LISTENING TO AILE AROUND THE EKYOTO

THE NECESSITY OF CROSS-CULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS IN PURSUIT OF KINGDOM-LIKENESS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TURKISH AND UGANDAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GLOBAL CHURCH

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Abstract

This thesis invites readers to consider the necessity of engaging in cross-cultural partnerships to grow in Kingdom-likeness for the sake of being refined as the Body of Christ to be a better witness and reflection of the Kingdom of God to the world. The premise of this study comes from a collection of research and proposals done by sociologists, missiologists, and psychologists regarding the presence of blindspots for individuals and cultures. The thesis proposes the need for deliberate cross-cultural interactions with a humble posture for learning for readers' own perspectives to be exfoliated to see more clearly as each culture inherently has a tendency to syncretism majority cultural values with faith. In efforts to focus the breadth of cultures discussed, this thesis highlights on the work of God through the Christians in Turkey and Uganda, through interviews and historical analysis of the happenings to believers in these nations. The focus of this work is on the need for a broadening of listening to stories often untold across the Global Church for the sake of listening to learn, to expose one's own blindspots as one reads about the work of God through His Holy Spirit's presence in the lives and stories of believers across the world. First recognizing the cultural lens through which one hears and interprets another's story, as outlined in chapter 1 by the author detailing the lens through which this thesis has been written, prior to entering into a posture of listening to learn, and being open to allowing the Holy Spirit's movement in Global Church siblings to expose the reader's own biases, syncretistic cultural faith, and grow in new recognitions of the Kingdom of God through the *imago Dei* in other Christians. Chapter 2 gives a literary background of the aforementioned research tools previously put forth in this field and definitions of key terms. Chapter 3 focuses on the historical movement of God across the land of Turkey and through interviews with current pastors and believers, it highlights the current working of God in Turkey. Chapter 4 focuses on the historical movement of God across the land of Uganda and through interviews with local believers and Christian female theologians in East Africa, it highlights the current movement of God in Uganda. Chapter 5 points to Revelation 7:9 as an image of what the Body of Christ is to look like in the Kingdom of God, and how that image of all believers from every tribe, tongue, and nation are equally represented, forever holding their unique ethnicity in the Kingdom of God as part of a reflection of His eternal glory, eternal creation, and being One as the Bride of Christ. It draws together the learnings from believers in Turkey and Uganda as reminders of the ways these Global Church siblings share unique glimpses of the Kingdom of God and highlights how God has worked through similarly backgrounded believers in the Early Church as well. A key question this thesis proposes comes from an East African theologian, Sister Anne, who asks the world in her writings for the theological discourse to move from a Euro-American centered church to a world-centered church. This thesis is an attempt to give a path forward to move in that direction for growth for individuals, for the Church, and to be refined as a more accurate reflection of Revelation 7:9 as a witness of the Kingdom of God to the world.

VITA

The author of this work is Rebekah Petek Altuğ. Raised in İstanbul, Turkey, where she lived most of her childhood and adolescent life prior to moving to the USA with her family. She graduated from The Stony Brook School, in Stony Brook, NY and went on to attend Wellesley College, MA where she studied sociology and pre-medicine. Following her undergraduate years, she was called into campus ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship where she remained serving in the Boston area at Wellesley and MIT until 2015. She lived and worked in Uganda for one year, prior to beginning full-time studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary while continuing to serve in Uganda between terms. She deeply appreciated some of the friendships she grew in community with while there, including those she was able to serve alongside of on the Student Association as Environmental Senator and Secretary for the Exec Team. She completed her Masters of Intercultural Studies in 2019 and is a candidate for a Masters of Theology in 2021. She rejoined campus ministry with InterVarsity in 2020 and is currently serving as the Regional Champion of Justice and Global Engagement for the New England region undergraduates. She currently enjoys living in Waltham, MA with her housemate and sister in Christ from her local Chinese Church. They spend much time befriending many in their diverse neighborhood, trying the array of cuisines from local restaurants, walking the river trails, and feel a deep sense of home in this city of immigrants. When not in Waltham, she enjoys visiting immediate and extended family, and has especially enjoyed getting to be ‘Titi’ to her nephew and niece.

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I would also like to thank and acknowledge those who believed in this thesis, supported, prayed, encouraged, edited, gave feedback and made this possible. It takes a village, and as this thesis articulates, it is necessary to be in community that sharpens each other so we can grow in into the fullness of the Kingdom of God as He intended it to be. While there has been a village of family, friends, community, professors, and mentors shaping me through our conversations and relationships throughout my life, I would like to highlight a few that were especially present during this thesis process and formulation.

This thesis would not have been possible without the mentorship, advising, prayers, and full support of my thesis director Rev. Emmett G. Price III. His mentorship throughout my time at GCTS, for five years, has impacted my life in ways words cannot articulate. This thesis is in part, a summation of what he has taught me inside and outside of the classroom, of what it means to be a theologian in our times and persevere in hope for the Bride of Christ, that is the Church. Thank you for believing in me and in this thesis with faith before I fully believed it was possible.

Secondly, I would like to thank and acknowledge Dr. Paul Martindale for the support, mentorship, and hours dedicated as a secondary reader of this thesis. His mentorship during my years focusing on Intercultural Studies has also been incredibly instrumental to my academic growth and spiritual formation. The degree of Intercultural Studies would not have been possible without his presence at Gordon-Conwell, partnership, and expertise. Thank you for investing in the program for our generation and those to come.

Additionally, much of this thesis is based on unheard stories from the Global Church. It would not have been possible without the generous giving of time for interviews and willingness to share stories even with possible internet security threats. For the sake of security, names have been changed, but it is with my deepest appreciation to our siblings Pastor Emre, Pastor Ara, Brother Haik, Melinda, Gilian Edube, Layado Cecilia, James O'yet, and Nuwamanya Mategyero Daniel (whose interview sadly did not happen prior to the defense of this thesis, but will be included in future work.) Their voices have shaped this thesis into the fullness that it is. Thank you for sharing sacrificially and generously!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

For the past 2,000 years, a couple centuries of thriving followed by ongoing persecution, yet embers of the faithful few remain in Turkey, igniting hope for renewal and revival in Jesus' Name. In juxtaposition, within only 150 years in Uganda, masses of Christians flourishing amidst hardships and sufferings, tenaciously growing, yet cautious of the dangers of breadth without depth for roots to grow in Holy Spirit-led indigenous discipleship. These are the stories of the Turkish and Ugandan churches: valuable contributions to the Global Church's growth towards Kingdom-likeness and stories that often go untold. This juxtaposition of Kingdom value and unexpectedness of the Turkish and Ugandan Church voices to speak into the Global Church's formation is the catalyst for this thesis. Too often, what is written, discussed, and researched in the theological academy is from a position of pre-determined helpful voices for self-growth, usually understood to be "Western-centric, relating only to societies that are Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (i.e. WEIRD)".[1] However, there is a vast array of wealth in the wisdom, experience, contextualization, and spiritual strength that arises out of believers in lesser talked about areas of the world. These voices, contributions, and presence refine the lens to our theological understanding of the Kingdom of God. No matter the directional vector, cross-cultural partnerships and dialogue for reflective engagement is essential for a learner to be formed. No one perspective or culture holds the keys of the Kingdom in their own cultural domain and

[1] Gina Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "Christianity 2019: What's Missing? A Call for Further Research," International Bulletin of Mission Research 43, no. 1 (October 2018): 9, https://doi.org/10.1177/2396939318804771; Joseph Henrich, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan, "The Weirdest People in the World?," Behavioral and Brain Sciences, no. 33 (2010): 61–135.

theological framework of understanding. Thus, to pursue growth towards Kingdom-likeness, the Church, and the Western Church in particular, must humbly engage in cross-cultural partnerships to listen, learn, and be transformed by the *imago Dei* illuminated through each other. In allowing intimacy and trust to expose blindspots of cultural syncretism, distortions can be removed and the Bride of Christ can radiate a purer witness of His Kingdom reflection to the world.

What is visible in one interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is a culturally tainted understanding of truth of God through that particular lens of a moment in time. In theological academic discourse, good learning and dialogue must cross through history and culture, hear voices in contexts outside of one's own, be sharpened, refined, and inspired by deeper truths of His Kingdom beyond any cultural syncretism of what is commonly understood.[2] One's particular place in history is simultaneously nuanced with locality, gender, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, culture, religion, and academic engagement. All these pieces contribute to the shaping of one's interpretations of the world around them and the shaping of one's orthopraxis in relation to the orthodoxy and theology one develops. This shaping of one's unique locality when engaging with theology and living it out paints the foundational landscape upon which each believer builds their understanding of Christianity. Each perspective is unique, partly in the ways it reflects God's Kingdom as part of the Body of Christ and partly in the ways culture has enmeshed with faith tainting the lens through which one's perspective looks.

Without an exchange of interactions to learn from one another, we fail to see the fullness of God's Kingdom as portrayed by His people throughout the world. There is

[2] Kirsten Sanders, "What Is Theology?" (Lecture, Systematic Theology I, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, September 13, 2017).

uniqueness and diversity in the Body of Christ. Every believer is made in the image of God and filled with the Holy Spirit, and every believer is a member of the Body of Christ with its own unique gift to the Body.[3] This reality necessitates a deliberate and intimate partnership between differing believers across all cultures, to become more fully aware of a clearer picture of the Kingdom of God. No one culture or people group alone can fully represent the Kingdom of God as it is only one part of the Body of Christ. Ignorance of other parts of the Body of Christ are contributing factors to the blindness of seeing more of the Kingdom of God, as the Body of Christ is the Bride of Christ, which is an essential part of the Kingdom of God. Cultural enmeshment with faith is another contributing factor creating blindspots which go unnoticed within one's own cultural context. The need for cross-cultural partnership and engagement to learn from Global Church siblings to grow in Kingdom likeness is different than the secular mode of diversity where diverse people gather in a room together. Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice briefly speak of this in their work *Reconciling All Things*:

> *The problem arises when each group begins to think it is self-sufficient in its own identity. Moreover, in the absence of an explicit beyond, it is not clear what diversity really means, whose interests it serves, what it leads toward or why it is a good thing. For Christians, the language of reconciliation is not grounded in a historical or sociological reality, but in a theological one. A vision of reconciliation grounded in the story of God not only affirms diversity but also displays it as part of God's purpose in creation. We are created with different gifts for the sake of playing different roles in Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:12-31). God's story also names how all our diverse loyalties and allegiances have been compromised by Adam and Eve's rebellion against God (Gen 3). If the world is diverse in ways that should be celebrated, we contend that it is also diverse in ways that are deeply disordered because of long histories of separation, injustice and struggles for power…Diversity fails to deliver a vision that makes it worth deep personal, cultural and national sacrifices such as being transformed by strangers, engaging enemies and absorbing pain*

[3] Genesis 1:26-27, Acts 13:52, 1 Cor. 12:12-31

> *without passing it on. Too often 'diversity' becomes a cheap form of coalition building by essentially silencing difference.*[4]

It is in the learning process that ideas are exchanged, revelations become known, insights are discovered, and cultural syncretism with faith are exposed as the blindspots that they are and to be unlearned. Without this learning and unlearning process, if cultural blindspots go unaddressed, or if one culture's interpretation alone is the sole voice of interpretation and revelation of the Kingdom of God to the world, there is danger of harm perpetuating untruths of the Kingdom of God. Avoiding cross-cultural learning prevents each culture, and thus the Global Church as a whole, from walking with the glorious, reconciled radiance of the Kingdom as God as intended.

As the Body of Christ, there is a need for both individuals as well as the collective entity of the Church to come together across time, space, and geography to grow in Christ-likeness. What the current day Church has learned from the contributions of the Early Church are equally relevant to us today as the contributions of the majority world church in the Global South or as the contributions over centuries from the North Atlantic. Today, the Global South is where the highest percentage of conversion to Christianity, highest percentage of population of believers, and highest numerical gathering of all believers is gathered in the world.[5] If the Global Church is to grow from the theological discourse and reflections of those in other cultures while looking back in history to a previous era for direction today, it must equally look across the oceans and continents to

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[4] Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing, Resources for Reconciliation (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2008), 29–30.
[5] Dr. Gina A. Zurlo, "North and South, Up and Down," Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, October 15, 2020, https://www.gordonconwell.edu/blog/north-and-south-up-and-down/.Center for the Study of Global Christianity, "Global Christianity Infographic 2018" (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2018), https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/04/GlobalChristianityinfographic.pdfPg1_.pdf.

countries where deep growth is happening now to aid in the accumulation of its understanding of the Kingdom of God. Likewise, the Global South would be amiss to neglect lessons learned and spoken into by the history of the Western church in the North Atlantic as well. Learning in the Body of Christ needs to happen from and towards all directions across the various parts of the Body with mutual intentionality.

In learning from the journeys and stories of others, our own cultural syncretism is exposed in the overlapping of shifting apart what is of God and what is cultural.[6] It is necessary for the sake of robust Kingdom interpretations as devout believers across the globe uphold the sacredness of the Biblical texts as Holy and to illuminate guidance in life with the utmost authority, yet often interpretations vary based on the cultural lens through which the text is read. The cross-cultural dialogue and experiential partnerships of co-laboring in ministry also expose our blindspots individually and collectively, opening up space to reflect and be refined by our brothers and sisters in the Global Church for the sake of growing together in unity and love, to better reflect, witness, and proclaim the truth of the Kingdom of God to the world. No one perspective or culture holds a pristine and untarnished view of the Kingdom of God in their own cultural worldview and theological framework. From this vantage point, I believe it of greatest importance to engage in academic dialogue and discussion as the Body of Christ with every part of the Body, to listen and learn from those who have gone before, and those who are running alongside, however distant apart we might be on this earth. We are all seeking to fully know, to fully grow, and to more authentically reflect the Kingdom of God to the world so they too might know the Truth, resurrected life, peace, love, joy, justice, and shalom of Christ here on earth as it is in heaven. God's audacious desire to

[6] Robert Priest, See Figure 5.2

burst forth here on earth with heavenly glimpses of reality can only be realized when we recognize our view of reality is tainted and restrained by the cultural viewpoint we have inherited. We must humbly recognize, and in this recognition, listen to grow from one another, allowing the *imago Dei* of our brothers and sisters to shine a light of truth in solidarity to us. We must engage in the process of rejuvenation through the grinding away of cultural syncretism as blindspots are revealed with grace, love, and courage to move forward in hope of His better world.

As I write this, I realize that I too am fully immersed in the various cultural and theological roots of my own experience. Growing up in Turkey, being raised by evangelical parents trained at TEDS,[7] migrating to the USA circa 9/11, attending a secular women's college and Chinese Church in Boston, and spending my professional years in ministry with InterVarsity and working in Uganda, each location and community has shaped part of my worldview lens through which I interpret scripture and live out faith. What I hope to offer is a glimpse of the beauty of engaging in the learning process of cross-cultural partnerships for the sake of this refining and symbiotic process of exposing syncretism to flourish. It is not for selfish gain that I embark or ask others to embark on this journey. While this learning process does expose our own biases or blindspots due to syncretistic worldviews, it also has a great impact on communal formation such as the Church itself, locally and globally, as well as upon the world which is watching, observing, and analyzing the projection of Christ as seen through Christians across the world. Christ Jesus himself said to his disciples, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone

[7] Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS)

will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."[8] Love is an active verb, explained to always trust, always hope, always persevere, to not delight in evil, to rejoice in the truth, to never boast nor be prideful, and not to dishonor others.[9] Let us grow in loving each other well by listening, learning, embracing, and growing together, holding onto the thing that will outlast any partial knowledge, partial prophecy, or partial understanding in this lifetime as we engage in this academic pursuit of the Kingdom of God.

When we read the scriptures, we all bring a specific and unique perspective through which we are reading and interpreting what we are reading. Our own cultural context is informing how we interpret and understand the implications or applications of words on the page. From a Turkish lens, when reading I see the richness of heritage of hospitality, generosity, and opening of homes as a communal norm for loving those we are living among or may meet. From an American lens, it seems to be a transformation of the heart that leads people to be loving in such a way, growing from individuals into a larger communal body of believers. From a Chinese lens, it can be read as a sacrificial act of love empowers us to also sacrificially love, serve, and give to others beyond what might be expected out of reverence for Christ. From a Ugandan lens, it is an act of joy to give generously and abundantly to share everything in common with others all of which you have regardless of how much you begin with. All of these lenses bring truth to the table. None of these lenses are inherently anti-Biblical or heretical. However, as is true in every culture, human minds are tainted by sin and there is a need for mind renewal,[10] especially when unrecognized syncretism has taken place. So, if we only hear and are

[8] John 13:34-35
[9] 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 paraphrase NIV.
[10] Romans 12:2 paraphrase NIV.

informed from one perspective, we miss out on the larger picture of the fullness and richness of the text. This is just one example of how in the coming together of cultural perspectives that the bigger picture and fullness of the Kingdom of God is revealed. Each culture brings its lens to the text and to the table of conversation of theology. However, with these lenses, there are also inherent blindspots that are beyond the visibility through each particular cultural viewpoint.

Why Turkey and Uganda?

These two beloved nations might appear to be inconspicuous to the reader as to why we should listen, heed, or learn from them. Yet the depth of history in the lands, of two nations that share time, same longitudinal geographical flow, with over 50,000 years of human history each,[11] should be as relevant to us today in the 21st century as they have been to archaeologists and the common person for thousands of years.

Uganda is the land where the Nile River begins, the same river described in Genesis 41 and throughout Exodus, which records the beginning story of the people known to become the Israelites, just south of the land of Cush (current day Sudan). Uganda, a nation in East Africa that while only recently recognized as an independent republic in 1962,[12] has roots of humanity for millennia through clansmanship relating with the Kingdom of Ethiopia, which is one of the oldest countries as well as home to one

[11] Anna G. Edmonds, Turkey's Religious Sites, 1st ed (Istanbul: Damko, 1997), 28 ; Ann Gibbons, "Experts Question Study Claiming to Pinpoint Birthplace of All Humans," ScienceMag.org, American Association for the Advancement of Science, October 28, 2019, https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/10/experts-question-study-claiming-pinpoint-birthplace-all-humans. Note: "Evidence of human habitation as early as about 400,000 years ago has been found in caves on the lake of Küçük Çekmece near İstanbul. However, the earliest true settlements appear to be in Anatolia from the Stone Age beginning about 8,000 B.C." (Edmonds, p.28)

[12] G.N. Uzoigwe, "Uganda and Parliamentary Government," The Journal of Modern African Studies 21, no. 2 (June 1983): 253.

of the oldest Orthodox churches in the world. Uganda first received European Christian missionaries in 1877, and yet within 10 years had already buried the bodies of 31 Ugandan martyrs, the holy seed that drove masses to embrace the Christian faith across the land.[13] It could be speculated, that the movement and presence of the Holy Spirit already had cultivated the hearts and peoples to know Him, before anyone arrived; the arrival of non-African Christians was in response to a letter of invitation from the Kabaka (King of Buganda) to come and share their faith. It could also be speculated it was as much a religious political move of resistance to seek support against the Muslim Arabs as a genuine interest in Christianity.[14] One cannot invite someone to share a foreign faith if they do not already have some knowledge and awareness of it, either from the divine work of the Holy Spirit or from other humans. Regardless, there has been "no clearer instance in the colonial era of the cross preceding the flag."[15]

Turkey is a current day crossroads between the EU[16] and the Middle East and continues its established identity as a "great world crossroads…linking Anatolia to the East, to Egypt and to Europe"[17] as it is situated along the silk road, where travelers from many nations come through. Turkey is the homeland of Abraham, who settled in Haran (current day Şanlıurfa, also known as Urfa, in southeastern Turkey), where Mount Ararat reportedly encapsulates the Ark of Noah situated near the border of Armenia, and where Antakya remains vibrantly populated two millennia after it was first reported of

[13] William B. Anderson, The Church in East Africa, 1840-1974. (Dodoma: Central Tanganyika, 1977), 29, 32.
[14] John F. Faupel, African Holocaust: The Story of the Uganda Martyrs (Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing, LLC, 2011), 10.
[15] Gordon Hewitt, The Problems of Success: A History of the Church Missionary Society, 1910-1942 (London: SCM Press, 1971), 205.
[16] European Union
[17] Edmonds, Turkey's Religious Sites, 27.

Christians being named in Antioch.[18] The stone-remains of the seven churches written to in Revelation and ancient church ruins are a reminder of the vibrancy that once was. The standing Archbishop of Constantinople is a testament of the remnant of hope and continued faith in the land despite ongoing persecution since the beginning of the Church. The presence of both the history of what was and living brethren persevering in the faith despite being less than 1% of the population, speaks volumes to the Global Church to listen to and learn from.

The rich history of both lands and people groups is something the Global Church can learn from when leaning in to see the movement of God through the people of God regardless of culture or century. In listening, the Global Church can grow to be shaped more intentionally into the Kingdom God has intended. 1 Corinthians 12:24-25 states that: "But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other." Let us have equal concern for the voice, perspective, and Kingdom reflection coming out of the Turkish and Ugandan churches, perhaps more than we have considered in the past, as it will contribute to our own future growth and witness of His Kingdom to the world.

What Inspired this Thesis

My life experiences have led me to ask questions - many questions. Why does the theology and work of a few monks and pastors from Europe in the 1500s such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, have more weight in conversations and discussions today than the work and theology of priests coming out of the Ethiopian, Coptic, or Syrian churches

[18] Acts 11:19-26

since the first century? Why have the eras of Christian nationalism been upheld in reverence when Jesus himself refused political power, claiming the Kingdom He was about was not of this world? Why have Christians in the West become complacent in faith, seeking comfort and acceptance above all when Christ Jesus' example was to choose the way of the cross as opposed to fame, power, and socially systemic acceptable forms of religion in his time? What role should the persecuted church in the Middle East, India, North and Central Africa, South East Asia or Oceania have in guiding the future of Global Christianity in following Jesus more so than leaders in majority historic Christian proclaimed nations? How can a more authentic example of the Kingdom of God, as proclaimed and demonstrated by Christ Jesus himself, be demonstrated through the Body of Christ (which is the Global Church today) to the weary world in need of hope, truth, love, and life?

These questions are some of the undercurrent thoughts that prompted my studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and in particular, my academic foci in the Department of Intercultural Studies and Theology. My journey to seminary was sparked at a young age through interest in theological discussions with family and friends during my pre-teen years, yet postponed after graduating from Wellesley College as I had other vocational pursuits in my mind. After eight years of ministry with InterVarsity (IV) and ChildVoice International, I felt called by God to return to the USA to pursue theological studies for further equipping in ministry and theological growth as I was engaging daily cross-culturally. In addition to my childhood and adolescent formation in Turkey, the years of ministry in multi-ethnic settings, surrounded by BCM and AAM[19] leading scholars and pastors, while rooted spiritually in a Chinese home church in Greater

[19] Black Campus Ministry (BCM) and Asian American Ministry (AAM)

Boston, and working abroad with Ugandan and Nigerian peers all formed parts of me. Each of these spaces and groups of believers, culturally distinct, diverse, and filled with the Spirit, influenced my own growth as well as exposed biases, false learnings, and illuminated blindspots I had failed to acknowledge existed prior to these cross-cultural partnerships.

Gordon-Conwell is the home of the Center of the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC). According to a 2017 CSGC report, "Despite Europe being the birthplace of Protestantism, it is expected that by 2050, less than 10% of Protestants will live in Europe. Today, Africa is home to 41% of all Protestants. By 2050, it is expected that 53% of all Protestants will live in Africa."[20] In addition, that statistic does not take into account the projected growth of Eastern Orthodoxy, whether it be Ethiopian, Greek, Syrian, or Russian, nor does it include the remnant of Coptic believers in Egypt or Thomas Christians in India tracing their faith heritage back to Saint Thomas, who walked with Jesus. The church in Ethiopia can trace its heritage back to Saint Philip, and we can all read the account of the first believer being the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. Each of these gatherings of believers has a unique story of what following Jesus and growing through the power of the Holy Spirit's transformational presence in their lives looks like in their cultural context. This is a process that contributes to Global Church growth and formation, if we are to stop and listen, to learn from one another. My most significant seasons of immersion for formation and growth in cross-cultural partnerships outside of North America happened in Turkey and Uganda.

[20] Center for the Study of Global Christianity, "500 Years of Protestantism," 2017, https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/04/136e0d3b6-d706-4bcf-a892-87a608c59104-18.pdf.

There are many North Americans writing on the Black American, Asian American, and Latino American perspectives, which offer gems of wisdom to be read.[21] However, not as much has been written from the Middle East, particularly the Turkish Christian perspective and the Ugandan perspective coming out of East Africa. I do not claim to be an expert on either, but rather hope to elevate the local Christian voices and use my academic research platform to direct listening and learning towards the brilliance of the Turkish and Ugandan Churches, gatherings of believers who are rich in faith and vibrant in joyful life following Christ Jesus with their lives. Perhaps, we will see our own blindspots as we gaze through the Christian lens of a fellow believer.

Author's Own Biases, Assumptions, Experiences and Context

My life has shaped who I am today and how I see the world. There is no doubt in my mind that this journey I have been on from birth till now has steered the trajectory of my life including the direction of my academic interests and theological pursuits. Thus, let me share a bit of who I am and where I am coming from so that the lens from which I write this thesis can be better understood.

Personally, I am strongly interested in cultural syncretism and blindspots because I have grown up my whole life living in multiple blended worlds. I have lived experiences of navigating how different cultures interact with each other, how cultures are shaped through gentle and intentional friendships, or silenced and ignored as a result of arrogant and blatant stubbornness. I identify as a Turkish-American. My biological

[21] There are too many authors to name here. See Bibliography for a few influential authors from the Black American, Asian American, and Latino American perspectives that have shaped this thesis. See Chapter 5 for the naming of specific female scholars who are doing phenomenal work theologically contributing to the growth and formation of the Global Church perspective as well.

ethnic heritage is a blend of my Turkish family, with whom I grew up knowing closely during the first 16 years of life, and from my American side of the family - a mutt-mix of Welsh, German, Sioux Indian, and non-disclosed nor talked about inheritance lines from the Appalachian coal mines, that strongly shaped my parents' identities themselves. From the city of my childhood, I learned that no one group of people, time of living, or continent reigned superior (with a small exception to the absolute public allegiance to Atatürk). İstanbul- my hometown that shaped the childhood and adolescent formative years of my life is a city on two continents, a daily reminder when living in Europe that Asia is just across the Bosphorus[22] through my open window, and a place I frequently would travel to in order to see friends or family. The immaculate visible presence of the Walls of Constantinople, alongside the Valen aqueduct, Basilica Cistern, Haghia Sophia, Grand Bazar, Topkapi Palace, and preservation of Dolmabahçe Palace and 101 Pera Palace Hotel Room intermixed with the buzz of modern businesses, disco clubs, and metros. Bridges that span over 1 km, connecting the continents above the waters, tower over the many mini-boats and ferries speeding along across the Bosphorus surface - the same river that the Marmaray is built under connecting the intercontinental historic and modern hubs of Istanbul 60km below the water.[23] This is the city I grew up in and call home.

This is the city that formed my identity. An identity shaped as much by being born Turkish-American, as it was living in this multiple-era shining city. Molded by my international community school where the majority culture of my peers was biracial or

[22] The Bosphorus is one of the two straights in Turkey that separates Europe from Asia. The Bosphorus joins the Black Sea with the Marmara Sea, and the Marmara Sea is joined to the Aegean Sea through the Dardanelles, the other straight.
[23] See Figures 1.1 and 1.2

multicultural children, majority of whom were part-Turkish and part-something else. Rooted and poured into spiritually by my church of 150 people from many nations, being led in worship from Kenyan, Korean, Turkish, or Dutch brothers and sisters, prayed over by Iraqi, Singaporean, Scottish, and Nigerians, receiving sermons from Australians, South Africans, Americans, or rotating visiting guests, all while being raised in the home of my parents with aunties from Uganda, Madagascar, Turkey, and the USA. The Body of Christ that I grew up knowing was the church I grew up seeing- one where people from every language, tribe, and nation gathered to worship and praise God together. As we gathered, we learned new songs of praise, of dance, or worship and prayer. Not unlike the International Day celebrations at my school where we ate homemade food from every household and country represented, church was also a gathering of people, sharing who we were in Christ by bringing to the table where we were from and embracing each other as brother and sister.

I knew of some divisions in Christianity as our Protestant congregation would only join the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic churches for special Holy Days, like Good Friday, or Christmas Eve services, even though all our buildings for worship were in walking distance of each other. Yet the disagreements in the Protestant church did not seem as apparent to me apart from some teasing I would notice among the adults as Mennonite, Brethren, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Charismatics, and non-denominational banter would be stirred up over lunches shared together or at tea and biscuits in the garden after service. If anything, it was precisely these denominational differences among foreigners that local Turkish believers had issues with as they sought to build their own Turkish Church identity with conflicting voices trying to guide them in

their North Atlantic rooted preferences and interpretations. This was something I barely got wind of as a young teen, yet have learned to be more prevalent over my years of studying and engaging since. Interviews with local Turkish pastors will elaborate more of this in Chapter 3.

Moving to the USA just before my sophomore year of high school, just weeks before 9/11 billowed a hole in the façade of American exceptionalism,[24] was a startling awakening for me especially as to how Americans viewed faith and Christianity. Long-gone were the internationally formed fellowships of Scripture, prayer, music, song, dance, and lingering for hours of breaking bread together that filled our stomachs as we laughed and cried together in community for hours. In these pews were people who almost all looked the same, majority white Americans at the church we were attending, who would greet with a smile and 'hello how are you' yet not always waiting for a nod or answer before asking the next person the same, with the same preacher week after week and same worship team week after week, with their songs on repeat. People would complain if service went more than the hour they had allotted and were on the edge of their seats waiting for it to end, like a student wanting to jet out of a class the moment the bell would ring, rather than linger in the aroma of Christ filling the sanctuary through His people who reflected Him there.

Sundays became a 'get up, get dressed, sit and listen with a fake smile' then come home and relax before doing homework or watching football, rather than a day I looked

[24] The notion that America sees itself as an 'exceptional' nation is common colloquial verbiage often used by non-Americans when referring back to what has been shared to them by Americans abroad, however this concept has also been academically researched and discussed by Peter Onuf, among other scholars. Peter Onuf sites the Pew Research Center 2011 as stating: "The view that the United States is a great nation is widely held across all typology groups. About nine-in-ten Americans say the United States either stands above all other countries in the world (38%) or is one of the greatest along with some others (53%). Just 8% say there are other countries that are better than the U.S." Peter Onuf, "American Exceptionalism and National Identity," American Political Thought 1, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 77, https://doi.org/10.1086/664594.

forward to all week where I could see friends who loved God, laugh, eat, praise Him, and be together in a special kind of community. I wept and missed home, and started to realize I needed to seek God apart from the church community I was being offered because the God I knew and Body of Christ that had formed me was a far cry from what I now saw before me. I learned to close my eyes in worship in the USA to try to focus on God, but in doing so, I think I inadvertently closed my eyes to the ugly reality of the white evangelical American Church that I had stumbled my way into that was physically around me.

Perhaps it was my loving relationships with extended family in the USA that also separated my thoughts from fully seeing the patterns that abounded. Many of my parents' cousins, aunts, uncles, a few of their parents, and some old friends who were basically family, were God fearing and Jesus loving white evangelical believers. When I was in their homes, the hospitality and love of Christ was very present in quite a different way than in the church. It was almost as if the biological family was more of a priority in the seeking out to love and honor than the family of God communally together, and the individual and personal walk with God was taught as more important than the collective pursuit of Christ-like community. There was a theological split where some lived out that Medieval saying that 'blood was thicker than water', yet as Dominique Gilliard states: "The scriptures actually tell us that the baptismal waters are thicker than our ancestral bloodlines, and baptism and the spirit fundamentally reconstruct our family lineage, who we are connected to."[25]

[25] Dominique Gilliard, "Justice That Restores" (Artisan Church, Rochester, NY, March 4, 2018), 13, https://artisanwagtail-live-efcfb5afe2754e3fa38-f80b561.divio-media.com/docs/2018-03-04_Justice_That_Restores.pdf.

It has been a long journey for me to come to a place where my heart weeps again, laments, and desires to see hopeful movement towards Christ in the North American Church. My personal dissonance and experiences of rejection as a Turkish-American, who walked into an anti-Middle Eastern nation in 2001, by Christians and non-Christians alike, aided the walls that were built by the lies I was told and believed that I didn't belong here. When I went off to college, my only goal was to study something so that I could get a job that allowed me to move to a different country.

God had other plans, and it was these plans of His, that have shaped my studies over the years from Wellesley College, into full-time ministry, and throughout seminary. During my undergrad years at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, I focused my studies on Sociology and "Pre-Med". My internal disposition towards knowing and loving people, seeing the oppressed and marginalized, and desiring to draw them into the fold of love and advocate for their flourishing, attracted me to Sociology. It was in my Introductory course to the field that ignited my intrigue for understanding the societal formation of norms as we studied "Deviance and Conformity," giving me academic language to articulate things I had seen or experienced throughout my young life, and opening space to ask hard questions like - why are some cultures normalized and others are seen as abnormal? How do we change these fictitious lines that are drawn in the sand around power-ruled statements of normalcy and majority? I was interested in who determines the rules and how do you change the rules, the system, because it does not work for everyone.

My second Sociology course confirmed my desire to major in this field, as it focused on "Social Inequality: Race, Class, and Gender," taught by a Christian professor

at one of the most liberal Women's Colleges in the nation. I was allowed to research and ask hard questions that did not need to be censored for anyone. Yet simultaneously, I could fully bring my faith-shaped perspective to the table as I engaged with these hard questions in society. The intersectionality of faith while studying the atrocities of the world, and the current ongoing inequities of society (as exposed for me after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 hit New Orleans), shaped the major question that drove my college years of education and professional choice after college. How does the hope of Jesus proclaimed and demonstrated in the Books of the Gospels bring true Kingdom hope here on earth as it is in heaven[26] for all people of every nation, race, class, tribe, and gender? And how do we as Christians follow Him such that we do not perpetuate injustice, inequity, bias, prejudice, hate, nor discrimination, but rather welcome, learn, embrace, support, encourage, uplift, and grow in Christ-likeness together through love and unity of the Spirit for the building of His Church and witness of His Kingdom to the world?

During my college years I got involved with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), a multi-ethnic gathering of women on my campus, predominately led by Asian-American upperclassmen, with a couple Caribbean, Ghanaian, and New England white Americas involved too. It was the first time I found a spiritual home among like-minded believers since my arrival in the USA, and through these friendships, I got connected with the Chinese Bible Church of Greater Boston (CBCGB), which has been my home church in Massachusetts for the past 16 years. Following graduation, I served on staff with InterVarsity as a campus staff minister for 7 years, both at Wellesley for a year and then at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for the remainder of my tenure. My friendships with Asian American Ministry (AAM) staff were extremely influential

[26] Matthew 6:10

for me, as most of my time of staff, I was supervised, poured into, and guided by AAM supervisors or team leaders.[27] Their mentorships and friendships were also formative, giving me space to be both part of the Asian diaspora coming from Asia-minor while recognizing that East and West Asian backgrounds also have their differences.

While on staff, I got connected with Black Campus Ministry (BCM) staff, a focused ministry of InterVarsity that seeks to equip and empower Black students to thrive in faith and come to a vibrant relationship with God in a safe community. There was something different for me in my conversations with BCM staff, and it was alongside BCM staff and students, that I felt the most seen and welcomed in my Turkish-American identity, free to be fully myself. I grew in trust with BCM, and I saw them as spiritual and cultural mentors for me, as I understood they saw things in faith as I did, yet with a societal, cultural, and historical understanding I did not have. Several of the BCM staff became dear friends and mentors.[28] Conversations with fellow staff, regional conferences, and the growth of BCM ministry within the MIT-IV chapter that I was planting, all played a significant role in forming my theology of orthopraxy. In reflection, I believe it was the hope and joy offered with steadfast strength grounded in truth that radiated and reminded me of the Body of Christ I had grown up around. In the diaspora of Black Christians around me was a multitude of cultures, traditions, languages, dispositions, and yet a coming together in the Name, hope, and power of Jesus over song,

[27] These supervisors included Susan Park, Sarah Shin, and Derek Wu from 2009-2015. Susan Park currently serves with Graduate and Faculty Ministry (GFM) of InterVarsity New England and Derek Wu serves as Regional Director for Undergraduate Ministries of InterVarsity New England. Sarah Shin has since moved on from her tenure with InterVarsity, yet continues to serve as a speaker, trainer, and academic in theological studies around ethnicity, race, and evangelism.

[28] There are too many friendships that have blessed and shaped me over the years to include. Some of the most significant BCM friendships and mentors that have lasted in relationship till today include Bolaji Oluwasola, Julian Reid, Josh and Tina Williams, Rev. Virginia Ward, all of whom continue to be iron-sharpening-iron spaces of growth and encouragement in Kingdom ministry in our various vocational calls in life today.

dance, laughter, and extended fellowship with good food that reminded me of a glimpse of home and a glimpse of heaven. These gatherings gave glimpses of His Kingdom bursting through despite the oppressive opposition beyond these precious spaces of fellowship.

My involvement with InterVarsity and formation through the BCM community, paralleled by the missional vision and momentum of my home Chinese Church (CBCGB), propelled me into a long-term commitment to partner with Ugandan Christian leaders for both short-term and mid-term vocational work. From 2012 until 2019, I spent 24 months in Uganda, 12 of them consecutively, working most closely with Acholi local leaders and NGO staff, as well as some with Lugbara, Luganda, and Bakiga staff, and Acholi, Kakwa, Dinka, and Nuur adolescent young women and their children, among a few others. Serving at a local village community church alongside brothers and sisters in Christ who have lived drastically different life experiences, and yet their faith is so rich, steadfast, and deep was incredibly sharpening for my own faith walk with God and trusting Him, especially amidst intense seasons of strife and spiritual warfare. Each person I have met, read scripture together with, lived in intentional Christian community with, and shared extended times of prayer, worship, praise, church fellowship, and serving in daily ministry with have shaped and influenced the lens through which I now approach scripture and interpret it for daily life application. From MIT and Harvard graduates to local village jajas,[29] who were prevented from accessing education due to war ransacking of lands, all have been voices of wisdom and Holy Spirit filled brothers and sisters in Christ.

[29] Local grandmothers or elderly female figures in Uganda.

Simultaneously while working in Uganda, I started attending Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary at their residential Hamilton Campus in MA. During my first-year there, I had the privilege of diving into courses that were exactly addressing some of the major life questions I had when it came to how Jesus' good news impacts societies, systems, and whole people groups around us rather than just the individual hearts, and what is our role as the Church in that proclamation in word and deed. Specifically paramount for me in that first-year of seminary was the tutelage I received in *Biblical Global Justice* with Rev. Dean Borgman, the *Project of Reconciliation: The Intersectionality of Faith and Culture* with Rev. Dr. Emmett G. Price III, and *Spiritual Power in Missions and Ministry* with Dr. Paul Martindale. It was that year that I committed myself to taking every course possible with both Dr. Price and Dr. Martindale as their wisdom, knowledge of Scripture, and practical life application of the truth of God penetrating places of darkness to bring forth hope, freedom, renewal, and life for every person through the power of love in the Holy Spirit was inspiring. Through their mentorship I went on to focus my studies around cross-cultural theological dynamics and practical application both in relation to the Black diaspora and the Global Church. Such studies included studies in the *Black Christian Experience: From Africa to the Americas*, *Prophets of the Civil Rights Movement*, *Applied Anthropology for Missions*, and *Critical Issues in the Christian Mission to Muslims*. Their mentorship inside and outside of the classroom was paramount for my theological and spiritual formation. Additionally, their phenomenal mentorship guided developing orthopraxy during my studies at the seminary, in conjunction with several other faculty such as Dr. Nicole Martin, Dr. Kirstin Sanders, Dr. Patrick Smith, Dr. Carol Kaminski, Dr. Xiyi Yao, Dr. Todd Johnson, and Dr. Jim

Singleton. It was not just in the classroom that my perspectives and worldview were challenged, sharpened, and shaped. It was also through the authentic and welcoming community with friends, gaining glimpses of life through their eyes on campus in relationship, conversations, and shared experiences.[30] Each year brought a different wave of friendships, roommates, colleagues to serve with on the Student Association, and families, all with their own life experiences, denominational backgrounds, rich cultural heritages, and hearts for God.

Currently, I write from the overlapping space of finishing my theological education at GCTS and serving in full-time ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship focusing on programs, curriculum development, and discipleship around justice and global engagement for college and university students in the New England region.

I am and forever will be on a journey of learning. What I write here and share are the voices that have sharpened and guided my own theological formation, which I hope to amplify for the sake of others' growth and the glory of God. Some of what I have learned has been absorbed into my bones and embodied my faith in ways in which it is hard to articulate, while other components are new insights, revelations, and considerations still being sorted in my mind. These voices to be heard in the following chapters have been part of my own refinement of perspectives, illuminating my own blindspots and areas of syncretistic faith that we all subconsciously have, as I hear from the voices of other Global believers and allow the Holy Spirit to convict and refine my

[30] Some of the GCTS friendships such as with Naomi Francois, Zack Stevenson, Jaronzie Harris, Sharon Dhavale, Adrienne Wilhoft, Su & Christina Kim, Sarah & Mohsen, Grace & Emmanuel, have remained steadfast ongoing friendships that have lasting and ongoing influence as I continue to journey through life with them and others. There are countless other friends who also impacted my season of life and community at GCTS.

perspective to be more like that of Christ's Kingdom. My prayer is each of us would listen and allow the Holy Spirit to work and illuminate in our hearts. As Dr. Nicole Martin is often reminding students in her classes as we process through differing Christian perspectives and voices, that we need to approach each other with grace, to listen, because we need each other, the Church needs each other and if we come together to learn from one another we will move forward towards the Kingdom.[31]

What to Expect in this Thesis

Chapter 1 is primarily establishing the overview concept of cultural syncretism, blindspots, and the necessity for cross-cultural partnerships to more fully see the Kingdom of God.[32] It establishes the social locality of the researcher and author of this thesis, giving background of history that has impacted the tint of lens and worldview through which this thesis has been written.

Chapter 2 is a literary review of other scholars' articulations of some issues regarding cultural syncretism and blindspots. Definitions of these terms will be reviewed, along with other helpful terminology that will further be needed to be part of our shared language experience as we journey together through the remaining chapters. The works of Paul Hiebert and Robert Priest in particular will be summarized and noted as some of the key foundational frameworks for this work in the 20th century. However, what they are lacking is a clearer articulation of forward momentum towards a holistic representation of the Kingdom of God, and the necessity for such growth through the iron sharpening and exposing process to take place within each culture.

[31] Dr. Nicole Massie Martin, "Race, Gender, and the American Church" (Online Graduate Seminary Class, Online Zoom Session 1, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC, May 20, 2021).
[32] Definitions of these terms and many others can be found in Chapter 2 or in the glossary.

Moving forward from here, Chapter 3 gives an overview of what gems the Global Church can learn from the rich history and presence of the Holy Spirit alive in Turkey, among Turkish believers, and how Turkish culture demonstrates part of the uniqueness of the Gospel. It will also address some of the blindspots that arise through cultural syncretism and ways in which the Gospel was enmeshed with other cultures upon foreign gospel proclamation in the land.

Chapter 4 is in parallel to Chapter 3, with a focused eye-view on Uganda. Similarly, as in Chapter 3, this chapter addresses the rich history and presence of the Holy Spirit alive in the people in Uganda who are seeking Jesus as Lord, the powerful testimony it is for the nation, as well as an example of intercession and forgiveness for the world to see. Both Chapters 3 and 4 will begin to address some of the blindspots that arise in particular cultures, but more than as an outside critic only critiquing other cultures, these chapters are meant to be used as space for self-reflection. Both Turkey and Uganda have rich vibrancy in their believers' lives and faith, yet their stories are often untold on the larger Global platform when academic dialogue convenes. These chapters highlight some of the truths of the Gospel untold, yet desperately needed to be heard and heeded by the Global Church, as part of the refining process to grow in Kingdom-likeness as a Global witness. These chapters also utilize many interviews as not much has been published for global access or distribution from these local churches.

Chapter 5 concludes this flow of dynamic discourse between these two seemingly different cultures perspectives and what they bring to the global conversation of theology. In response to the literary reviews first summarized, a new solution moving forward is proposed, where the interaction is not just beneficial for the receiver, but is mutually

critical. Multiple interactions of differing cross-cultural partnerships is the most helpful refining process to engage for a more deliberate pursuit of Kingdom-likeness as the Body of Christ collectively here in the world today. As this exfoliation transpires, glimpses of the Kingdom burst through, giving hope, deeper revelation, and a fuller picture of what is still yet to come.

Posturing to Engage in this Work

As we embark on this compound learning from the Turkish and Ugandan believers, I would like to invite us to partake in this dialogue as *aile* (family) or *koinonia* (fellowship) gathering around the *ekyoto* (fireplace).[33] Hospitality, family, fellowship, and communal learning from others, particularly from elders, are foundational to the spiritual formation to both our Turkish and Ugandan brothers and sisters. Other scholars, such as Diane Stinton, share a similar imagery when seeking to move towards a 'global hermeneutical community'[34] in Kenya of gathering around the *mwaki,*[35] the gathering place for extended family or community as an authentic and traditional practical part of indigenous life. Healey and Sybertz in their work of *Towards an African Narrative Theology* describe it as this:

[33] Aile is family in Turkish; Koinonia is fellowship in New Testament Greek; these two words were chosen to represent the family of God as the fellowship of believers Rev. 7:9. 'Ekyoto' is fireplace or fire in Luganda (one of the many languages of Uganda)- this word was chosen as in Uganda learning happens when the family gathers around the fireplace to listen, as well as a glimpse of gathering around the throne of God as displayed in Rev. 7:9. The Lord is represented as fire by day to His people in Exodus 13:21 and the Holy Spirit came down and filled believers (Acts 2:3-4) in what was seen as tongues of fire. This word choice was made to represent both the physical gathering and listening to learn as the family of God on earth from one another, as well as the spiritual family of God gathering to hear from God, or the image of God filled with the Spirit of God, that is the reality for believers in the Global Church throughout the ages.
[34] Allen L. Yeh, ed., Majority World Theologies: Theologizing from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Ends of the Earth, Evangelical Missiological Society Series, no. 26 (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2018), 68.
[35] Allen L. Yeh, ed., Majority World Theologies: Theologizing from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Ends of the Earth, Evangelical Missiological Society Series, no. 26 (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2018), 60.

> *A neighborhood community was called "mwaki" from the way that people made a fire and share that fire. When the fire had been lit in one home, all the other homes in the neighborhood took their fire from that one place. This sharing of the fire helped them to identify themselves as one community. "Mwaki" or "fire" was symbolic of other types of sharing and forms of communion, such as celebrations, performing local ceremonies, and discussing and approving important community issues.*[36]

As those who seek to learn from those who have gone before and those who are running alongside, may our posture be one modeled after James 1:19: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." May what we hear from the Turkish and Ugandan Church refine our own understanding of God's Kingdom such that we can allow *imago Dei* in our brothers and sisters infuse a more authentic lens as we allow our lenses to shift to illuminate a distilled clearer picture of the Kingdom. This process of distilling our vision of the Kingdom of God, can only come through a humble posture willing to enter into intimate cross-cultural dialogue, trust, and partnership with brothers and sisters in the Global Church. Without this, the prideful streak of self-reliance and cultural dominance hover at the edge of our minds, pulling forth the selfish notion that our culturally biased interpretations are the supreme and ultimate sources of knowledge for everyone else to agree to. In choosing to engage in cross-cultural dialogue, the hearer chooses to listen, to learn, to draw near, and even in the very action of increasing proximity, false assumptions and biased opinions are exposed and challenged, and as trust grows through intimacy, refining of thoughts is mutually achieved.

[36] Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, Towards an African Narrative Theology (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996), 123–24.

Figure 1.1 Aerial View of Bosphorus and Marmara Sea near the Golden Horn of İstanbul

Aerial Photo of İstanbul. Stock photo royalty free from iStock Photos. Photo Credit: GettyImages.

Foreground: Galata Tower surrounded by residential and businesses on European side of İstanbul connected by the Galata Bridge over the Golden Horn reaching the Old İstanbul (former Constantinople).

Far ground: Marmara Sea flowing into the Bosphorus to the left separating both Old İstanbul and European side of İstanbul from the Asian Side of İstanbul. Ferries and cargo ships along the water. Marmaray under the opening of the Bosphorus into the Marmara Sea.

Fıgure 1.2 Aerial View of Bosphorus Bridges in İstanbul

Aerial Photo of Fatih Sultan Mehmet Köprüsü (Bridge) in İstanbul. One of three bridges that spans across the Bosphorus.
Stock photo royalty free from iStock Photos. Credit: GettyImages.
Photography by Cem Aydin.

Chapter 2

Literary Review & Definitions: Culture, Syncretism, and Blindspots

> *You do not have a mind that belongs to yourself! Your thoughts are the thoughts of your culture! When you speak, it is not you but your culture, your religion, your traditions, your political or spiritual leaders speak! If not you but your culture, your religion etc. are speaking on behalf of you, then what are you, who are you?*
>
> *— **Mehmet Murat Ildan** (Turkish author and playwright)*

Every lens and worldview is constantly molded and shaped by culture, faith, traditions, people, and lived experiences. While most people in a shared culture tend to share a similar worldview, each person's worldview is also uniquely formed by various intersectional forces that exist within that culture. No one influence monopolizes the shaping of a worldview, unless that worldview is suspended in a monolithic bubble. Even in this unlikely happenstance, intersectional forces such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, race, sex, age, gender, education, and socioeconomic vectors interplay to shape one's socio-locative perspective and point of view within that bubble. There is no such thing as a worldview that is untouched by external intersectional influences within the culture.

To enter into the academic dialogue of hearing and learning from the perspective of someone with another cultural lens, one must first recognize their own lens and the framework through which they process, critique, and engage with others. In sum, one must first recognize their own cultural worldview and framework, in order to understand how their interpretation of someone else is processed within their own mental understanding and engagement. Awareness of one's own worldview informs knowing how one approaches someone else and how one approaches Scripture.

There are Christians across the globe who identify as followers of Jesus and are part of the wider Global Church. There is a temptation for people to be ethnocentric.[37] Yet there is a rich diversity in the ethnosphere comprised of the believers in the Global Church, which varies by language, tongue, wealth, gender, education, and more. One country's interpretation of Scripture or another people group's ability to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit, cannot be seen as supreme or superior with respect to their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, as all are One in the Body of Christ, filled with the same Holy Spirit that rose Christ Jesus from the dead.[38] Those who believe in Christ Jesus, and call upon His Name, all have the same promise now that Jesus Christ is with the Father, that whatever is asked in His Name will be done, things even greater than those seen during Jesus' time here on earth.[39] This is the promise given by Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper, those who were walking with him, a mix of uneducated fishermen, educated tax collectors, and a zealot among others. His proclamation of the Kingdom of God and calling of people to follow him was not good news promised to the twelve disciples alone, but also to countless other men and women in the seventy-two he sent out, and the thousands to whom he preached about the Kingdom of God and whom he fed.[40]

The Early Church itself demonstrates that the power of the Spirit of God and the ability to know the truth of God does not rest on education and literacy. Saul was a very well-trained and educated religious man, multi-cultural in heritage shaped by both Jewish

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[37] Robert J. Priest et al., "Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement," Missiology: An International Review 34, no. 4 (October 2006): 443, https://doi.org/10.1177/009182960603400403.
[38] Romans 8:11
[39] John 14:12-14
[40] Luke 10:1-23, Matthew 15:29-39, Mark 8:1-9, Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-14

and Roman culture. Yet did not know Christ until he was given a vision which convicted him of his misinterpretations of all the Hebrew passages he had studied all his life. Peter on the other hand, was a Jew trained as a fisherman. Yet upon listening to and walking with Jesus, listening in the synagogues, and encountering Jesus Christ in his own life, he grew in faith, maturity, and wisdom to become the rock the Church was built upon. These disciples, along with others described in the New Testament, such as the Ethiopian eunuch, the Magi from the East, the Canaanite mother, the Centurion, and the Samaritan woman at the well all portray the truth that the Gospel is relevant and to be understood across all cultures, genders, and classes.[41] Yet the methods through which Jesus communicates the truth of His Kingdom is adjusted so that the Kingdom truth penetrates each culture without changing the culture to any one form to be understood. Each listener and worshipper heard God speak to them in the way they best understood and knew how to interpret what was being said; they did not need to learn a language or pedagogy countercultural to their intuition. None of them had to become a different ethnicity or gender to understand the truth of Christ. It met them where they were, and they even became examples to those who were from the dominant culture.[42]

Missiologists often speak about this as being the burden of the communicator, to make sure one communicates so that the audience correctly interprets. Christians agree that this is necessary for sharing the gospel with unbelievers and to meet them where they are at to communicate. However, this practice should also be present between Christians in different cultures hearing the Gospel from a fresh perspective, from a brother or sister

[41] Acts 8:26-40, Matthew 2:1-12, Matthew 15:21-29, Mark 7:25-30, Matthew 8:5-13, John 4:1-42
[42] Matthew 8:10

who uses Scripture to teach, rebuke, and correct, upon the Word of God – as the Holy Spirit has revealed His truth to them.

Historically, the Church has needed to heed the words of Jesus. Perhaps there is hypocrisy in the Church, a log blocking their vision and view of their neighbor, which is often visible and apparent to their neighbor. But perhaps they are too focused on the speck in their neighbor's eye that makes them close their ears to anything their neighbor might speak, believing their neighbor's vision is impaired without acknowledging their own blindspots caused by the log.[43] Corporate bodies such as churches and Christian institutions and organizations, are as much in need of sanctification and transformation through repentance and redemption as the Body of Christ as any individuals might be as well. Interestingly, it is also the neighbor who, despite the speck, might have the better vision and ability to draw near and help remove the log from the other. Trust built between siblings across people groups, through proximity in the Global Church, is foundational to the overall renewal of Kingdom vision in each individual and each larger Christian entity or body of believers. Cultural syncretism with faith is a global phenomenon, and yet the Gospel speaks hope, truth, redemption, and restoration through the cross for all peoples and all people groups.

Scripture speaks that only when the Body of Christ draws together through the power of the Holy Spirit with all the Lord's people; *that* is when the Body of Christ is able to grasp the fullness of the love of God.[44] Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit

[43] Matthew 7:5

[44] This thought was shared in passing dialogue from a GCTS colleague, Jaronzie Harris, upon discussion of this thesis. The initial thought of Ephesians 3:16-18 being relevant to this thesis was hers. The elaboration and integration of this thought through the Scriptures are my own.

in love and community with the other saints, something is missing. Ephesians 3:16-18 directly states:

> *"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."*

One cannot fully know the love of God without all of the Lord's holy people. Love, and a centering on others, increases the ability to see and receive the fullness of God's love through the embodiment of the Holy Spirit in His holy people. This is a gift, not just to the Church Body in its own formation, but to all looking to see what the people of God and Kingdom of God is about. Sarah Shin, evangelist, theologian and author of *Beyond Colorblind* writes: "We are most fully able to share the gospel when we can share about its impact on *all* of who we are. And when those diverse pieces come together as one body and share the myriad of stories of healing, reconciliation, and sacrificing for the other, we are a visibly powerful vessel of kingdom witness."[45]

For Christians, the question arises of how does the truth of Scripture shine through the various historical time periods and different cultural readings of the same written inspired word of God. One might ask: How does one's worldview effect their reading of Scripture? If scripture withstands the test of time, how does one uphold Biblical truth while being mindful to the cultural syncretism one has as an individual reader in a specific socio-location, time and context? Readers of Scripture and of theology must be mindful of a few things. First, remember how readers understand the

[45] Sarah Shin, Beyond Color Blind: Redeeming Our Ethnic Journey (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017), 11.

theology they are digesting and analyzing. Father John M. Waliggo, Ugandan Theologian and PhD, stated: "Theology, in all its branches, can best be understood when it is fully inserted into the cultures, times, circumstances, and concrete situations of a particular people."[46] As cultures vary, interpretations of theology also vary, as theology cannot remain stagnant in any particular time period or place.

In the dynamic discovering of revelation, there is a continual tension to hold onto the truth of God that is unchanging, and yet also remain open for transformation and revelation by the movement of the Holy Spirit, in order to bear witness to the Holy and Divine truth that is held steadfastly by God alone. Scripture itself testifies and speaks to the fact that humans can never fully understand the ways, wisdoms, nor thoughts of God: "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.[47] Additionally, the writer of Ecclesiastes says, "I realized that no one can discover everything God is doing under the sun. Not even the wisest people discover everything, no matter what they claim."[48] One must pursue the truth and revelation of God, while simultaneously acknowledging the limits of humanity, including the limitations inherent in syncretism with the culture which produce blindspots in viewing of the Kingdom of God.

So how do people understand the culture from which they are approaching others? How does one recognize the color of the tinted lenses through which they view the

[46] John M. Waliggo, "African Christology in a Situation of Suffering," in Faces of Jesus in Africa, 5th ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 164.
[47] Isaiah 55:8-9, NLT
[48] Ecclesiastes 8:17, NLT

world? Missiologists, anthropologists, and sociologists have discussed several terms through which all cultures exhibit some landing on the spectrum of differences.[49] To prepare ourselves as readers, as well as to more fully understand the stories and theological perspectives of which we will hear more of in Chapters 3 & 4 from some of the Turkish and Ugandan Church leaders, we will briefly discuss some of these terms here to establish a common language with respect to the terms that will be used.

All cultures exhibit visible and invisible qualities such as traditions, food, language, or clothing that is visible outwardly and underlying characteristics such as family values, spiritual beliefs, gender norms, and political ideologies, among many other qualities which are invisible.[50] How people make decisions, values that determine behaviors, priorities, and what is seen as most significant or important are some of the more unseen cultural differences that go deeper than anything and cannot be quickly seen by a brief encounter. Yet it is these very deep differences that often are the root cause of intercultural conflict, distrust, and misunderstandings when people from differing cultures seek to partner together or spend prolonged periods of time working together. People do not automatically recognize that their culture is not universally true or normal for the rest of humankind. Missiologist Charles H. Kraft writes:

> *We are conceived without culture, but immediately embark on a process that anthropologists call enculturation, socialization, or education…In this process we learn a particular set of habits - habitual patterns of perceiving reality, behaving, thinking, and so forth. By being trained into these habits we are automatically trained out of other habits. Because of this, we find it very difficult to understand the habitual behavior and habitual perception of people of other societies. The perspective and behaviors we have learned become automatic - so natural that we take our patterns as normal, as natural for all humans. We often cannot even*

[49] Paul Martindale, "WM722 #4 Culture Values I" (Powerpoint, Applied Anthropology for Missions, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, April 12, 2018).
[50] Shin, Beyond Color Blind, 123–123.

> *conceive of the fact that the reactions we have within our society are not natural for everybody, for our cultural behavior, though relative is learned as if it were absolute, as if it had a value as universal as mankind.*[51]

Cultural views and orientations are some of the deepest underlying indicators of how people in a particular culture might respond, behave, perceive, or interpret others' words and actions. When seeking to engage with people of another culture, whether cross-culturally within one's nation or in a transnational encounter, everyone starts from within their own culture's understanding of reality and normality. Dr. Rev. Brenda Salter McNeil speaks of this when discussing the posture needed to address cross-cultural partnerships pursuing reconciliation and the dangers of ethnocentrism:

> *Having been born into specific cultures, ethnic groups and social contexts, most of us begin the reconciliation process in preservation and isolation. This is the starting point. As we grow, we try to preserve the values and ways of life that define us, connect us and make us distinctive and special. And unless something happens to move us from this posture of preservation toward including and embracing others, we are prone to ethnocentrism. This sociological term denotes belief in the inherent superiority of one's own ethnic group or culture. It also suggests the tendency to consciously or unconsciously view other groups or cultures form the viewpoint of one's own culture and perspective, determining what's "normal," "good or bad", "right or wrong" based on standards that are established by and are most familiar to one's specific ethnic group. This is how we tend to orient ourselves in the world, which is a normal process, but we can quickly become entrenched and inflexible if we culturally isolate ourselves this way.*[52]

It is necessity to acknowledge the cultural norms one comes from and be aware that these norms influence the lens and vision that one has when engaging with someone from a different cultural background. Usually, these norms might be hidden or go undetected until someone from a different cultural set of norms acts in a way that arouses

[51] Charles H. Kraft, Anthropology for Christian Witness (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1996), 150.
[52] Brenda Salter McNeil, Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice (Dovers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, and imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2015), 43–44.

a reaction from the majority of the culture which is being entered into. While this behavior is normal for their home culture, it might be seen as offensive or wrong in a different culture. Life skills specialist and author of *Getting Ahead in a Just Getting' By World*, Phil DeVol, along with the team of colleagues who focus on helping under-resourced communities break through the societal structures and rules of classism to become more empowered citizens alongside well-resourced or over-resourced communities, names this as "knowing hidden rules".[53] Among ten other resources in life, the knowledge of hidden rules empowers individuals and communities to thrive and flourish, and inversely the lack of knowledge of these hidden rules can prevent trust, acceptance, collaboration, or partnerships from forming.[54] Chris Parsons, a researcher, curriculum developer, and trainer also facilitates sessions of *Getting Ahead in a Just Getting By World.* She specializes in creating contextualization of the curriculum alongside local leaders as she has worked among various people groups globally and translates this concept as 'Hidden Cultural Rules' as it is a critical life skill whether crossing socio-economic cultural spaces or other cultural spaces.[55]

Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Griere, highlights these types of encounters as being one of the catalytic moments of learning: "Conflict is the midwife of consciousness."[56] We aren't aware unless we experience something that jars us or wakes us up. Without a distribution of norms, the norms might go unseen regardless if they are healthy, Biblical, syncretistic, or inconsequential. Conflict ushers in consciousness. Any

[53] Philip E. DeVol, Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-by World: Building Your Resources for a Better Life, Third edition, revised (Highlands, TX: Aha! Process, 2015), 45.
[54] DeVol.
[55] Chris Parsons, Personal Communication with Chris Parsons, Face to Face, July 17, 2019.
[56] Myles Horton et al., We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 180.

conflict can arouse consciousness of a variety of sorts from political to ideological to theological considerations and more. When discussing the topic of culture, conflict arises when hidden rules are unknowingly crossed, whether those are class culture, ethnic culture, or familial home culture rules. Inversely, knowing the hidden rules allows fluidity of functionality and it can "help build relationships of mutual respect."[57] It is only upon encountering a person from a different set of hidden rules, usually from a different ethnicity or culture, that the awakening of consciousness takes place as one must face the fact that humans of equal intellect, value, and worth present a different framework through which to understand, perceive, and engage with the world. Worldviews are challenged and the consciousness of discernment begins to acknowledge one's own worldview as well as to listen and learn about the other worldview being presented. For Christians, this is an especially beautiful encounter if approached with a posture of humility and learning. We are all made in the *imago Dei* and thus, all present a unique portrayal of the *imago Dei* and of the Kingdom of God. "Each of our ethnicities has distinctives, cultural particular expressions, of how we live out the *imago Dei."*[58]

Definitions of Terms:

Our vision of the surrounding world and blindspots are inevitable part of both physical and psychological seeing. Without the presence of others, blindspots might go unaddressed leading to a lack of fully seeing the complete picture. At times, this can lead to dangerous collisions where one might negate one's responsibility of error, while another fully knows that it was the blind spot of the other that caused the collision which

[57] Philip E DeVol, Facilitator Notes for Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-by World: Building Your Resources for a Better Life, 2013, 94.
[58] Shin, Beyond Color Blind, 34.

is often true in cases of vehicle accidents. The lack of awareness of what is going on in one's blind spot does not imply innocence nor does it negate responsibility despite being involuntary participation. Thus, defining and understanding both vision and blindspots is needed to know how to best become aware and allow others' perceptions to expand our peripheral view beyond the individual's own lens.

Vision: Vision as a noun is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the faculty or state of being able to see." In essence, it is both the ability to see and the ability to be aware of what we are seeing. To have vision, in the physical sense of the word, one must have a conscious awareness of what is in front of oneself. There are challenges to having vision, that some might be aware of, such as if someone is trying to read a book at night without a light, the ability to see is impaired by the darkness. Usually, a reader is aware of the state of light around oneself and can adjust for the situation by turning on a lamp or choosing to read later when there is more accessibility to natural light. A reader might even try to strain her eye if it is dusk, hoping that the remaining streams of light will be sufficient to read what is before her. In such a situation, a reader is fully aware of the limitations caused by her particular situation and surroundings. She takes these things into account and adjusts so that she can more fully read, learn, and grow from the text on a page at a later time. A reader's self-awareness of her surroundings does not always diminish her ability to engage as a reader, but her awareness aids her ability to adjust to the situations to be the best reader she can be and learn the most she can, her original objective to sitting down in the first place.

Now consider a person who is blind or visually impaired. When a person who is visually impaired or blind desires to read, they too can adjust. The adjustments might

look extremely different as the innate natural capacity of the individual is different. A visually impaired individual might need an external tool such as a pair of glasses, contacts, or specialized audio equipment. A person who is fully blind might need access to a Braille resource for translation ease of use. Instead of reading with one's eyes, a blind reader might read through her fingertips. She is still reading, still learning, and still growing in knowledge through her process of reading, however the process looks extremely different from when the individual's starting state of being able to see has a different starting foundation. The situations are different, and thus the adjustments needed to be made to accommodate for the situation will differ drastically.

In regard to culture, every person has a different starting foundational experience and understanding of reality, needs a different set of tools to adjust when encountering a new culture, and depending on how similar or different from the new worldview one's own is, slight or major adjustments are necessary to help with seeing or having vision in this new context. If one is not aware or chooses not to recognize one's foundational state of being, it makes the process of adjustment and acquisition of resources to aid in the reading or seeing process drastically different. To not recognize one's own foundational state of vision upon engaging into a new culture would be as if a visually impaired person or a deaf person believed they would need the same tools and resources offered to the sighted or hearing people rather than adjusted tools and resources to complete assigned readings or audio recordings of lectures in a majority sighted and hearing setting.

Blind spots or blindspot: It is a commonly used term in a wide variety of fields. In ophthalmology, it can be defined as: "(1) A small circumscribed area of the retina where the optic nerve enters the eye; occurs normally in all eyes; or (2) Any gap in the

visual field corresponding to an area of the retina where no visual cells are present; associated with eye disease; also known as the optic disk."[59] In psychiatry, it is defined as: "An area of a person's personality of which he is totally unaware, since recognition would cause painful emotions."[60] And in public health, blind spot is what is used to refer to the "physical space behind a driver's outer shoulder between that seen by the rear-view mirrors mounted on the inside and outside of a car."[61]

Psychologists Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald use the term 'blindspot' as a metaphor for the portion of the mind that houses hidden biases, whether those are cultural attitudes about age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexuality, disability status, or nationality. Blindspots, they contrast to *mindbugs,* which they define as "ingrained habits of thought that lead to errors in how we perceive, remember, reason, and make decisions."[62] Hidden biases are formed from life experiences and teachings, directly and indirectly, usually by the majority culture that has shaped one's worldview.

The presence of blindspots is a natural part of life. It shows us our limits, if we are wise enough to acknowledge them as it invites opportunity for dependency on others, to widen the scope and horizon of visibility through partnership together. Such expansion of view can only come through trusting those to one's left and right, that what they are seeing is indeed true and real. This is a great challenge as every person's perspective automatically places priority on the perspective from one's own point of

[59] Segen's Medical Dictionary, "Blind Spot," accessed November 4, 2020, https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/blind+spot.
[60] Segen's Medical Dictionary.
[61] Segen's Medical Dictionary.
[62] Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald, Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People (New York: Delacorte Press, 2013), 4.

view. Anything in contrast is automatically held under scrutiny and is up for critical review. This is the tension that needs to be addressed as blindspots might drive people to gaslight another person's experience causing distrust and division, rather than understanding and growth through the hearing of both sides to see the fuller picture of reality.

Every culture falls along the spectrum of various vectors intersecting to form its own unique combination of cultural values, from collectivists and individualists, to particularists and universalists, to private and inclusive, or diffuse and specific cultures among many others.[63] These spectrums refer to what is held as the central value which is often held in contrast to an opposing value. However, objectively speaking, one value is not greater than another.

For example, the polar opposite values of individual and collective, sociologically refer to cultures which place the highest value on either the individual or on the collective entity. 'Individualistic' refers to the presence, voice, and prominence of an individual as paramount in decision making processes and choices of behavior, with little acknowledgement or alteration adjusted for the community. In contrast, 'collectivistic' refers to the honoring, peacemaking, stability, and overall best choice for the collective entity, with little acknowledgement or a presumed acceptance from the individuals within the community for the sake of the greater good. One's view of another culture might be shaped from whether one is approaching another culture from an individualistic worldview framework or a collectivistic worldview framework. Gilian Edube, an East African theological ministerial leader and Trinitarian Evangelical Divinity School

[63] Paul Martindale, "WM722 #4 Culture Values I." See glossary at end of thesis for quick access to definitions of terms.

(TEDS) PhD candidate, offers the simple objective on these cultural framework differences: "It's not right. It's not wrong. It's just different."[64] A collectivistic culture is not better or more right than an individualistic culture, nor vice versa. Each culture has its blindspots and short-comings. Each has support from Scripture as being part of the Kingdom of God. A pendulum of theology which is weighted too much to either side is in need of correction through hearing and heeding the theological voices from the other side of the spectrum.

As a student of theology in the Western North Atlantic region of the Global Church, with roots of formation in the Middle East and East Africa, it is my joy to elevate the voices of Christians from these lesser heard parts of the Body of Christ for the sake of the collective Global Church to grow and learn. Throughout my studies at Gordon-Conwell, a deep personal observation was named and wrestled through in readings and coursework, most succinctly stated by Paul Hiebert in his work *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*:

> *The focus on the individual has led to a neglect of the central message that Jesus preached during his ministry on earth, namely the kingdom of God. For many the focus of missions is evangelism - leading individuals to faith in Christ…Even those who make church planting their goal see the kingdom largely as doing good deeds on earth, not as the commencement of God's reign on earth in our day.*[65]

This dichotomy of how the sociological cultural perspective of individual versus the collective influences not only how Scripture is read, but also how it is interpreted, and how the vision and mission of the Global Church is articulated and lived out collectively.

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[64] Gilian Edube, April 27, 2021 Zoom Interview with Gilian, Video Call, April 27, 2021.
[65] Paul G. Hiebert, Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2008), 174.

Worldviews matter. Cultures matter. Lenses, through which one receives data from the world around any communication or observation, are shaped and project the interpretation which is most likely to form in one's mind. Just as the Genesis 1:26 passage is used to wholeheartedly support *imago Dei* for the theological understanding that every person is made in the image of God, it is equally supportive of the theological understanding that every people group is collectively made in the image of God. The word *adam* in Hebrew, most commonly translated to the English word 'man' has both a singular and plural definition.[66] It is commonly understood by Hebrew scholars to be describing humankind collectively as much as it is used to describe man as a singular masculine human being.

Without opening our ears and allowing our minds to hear from Global siblings, we miss out on seeing more glimpses of truth that come to light and can draw us deeper into the everlasting wholeness and fullness of the Truth of God, step by step. If we remain stuck in an 'us' vs. 'them' mentality, we will always judge from a self-righteous better than thou art condemnation without self-reflection or looking into a mirror. The errors of such a perspective are most eloquently articulated by the Christian Turkish scholar and researcher Dr. Ziya Meral:

> *Jesus not only declares a completely opposite theology of relating to the 'other' who may have offended us, or may have even harmed us or may do so in the future, but also demands the same attitude from his followers. His imperative brings with it an automatic judgment, one will either hear his voice and follow his call or one will continue to develop a pure and godly 'we'. One will either seek [Jesus'] face in the zone in which dehumanization takes place or amongst 'us', which is in its worst form when we presume to see [Jesus'] face when we look into the water.*[67]

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[66] Spiros Zodhiates, Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible: Key Insights into God's Word: NASB, New American Standard Bible (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2008), 1792.
[67] Ziya Meral, "A Theology of Guantanamo Bay," December 27, 2007, https://www.ziyameral.com/updates/yameral.com/2007/12/theology-of-guantanomo-bay.html.

This concept of one culture or nation holding the truth of the gospel, as if they alone were beloved by God or their culture most represented God's Kingdom, is exactly the pattern of failure which missiologist Paul Hiebert warns has been a dangerous historical pattern for the Church:

> *One great danger the church faces is equating itself with an ethnic community or culture. The result is cultural Christianity. This leads to a loss of the universal nature of the gospel and of a mission passion to reach the ends of the world. A second danger is that of wedding itself to nation-states and thereby becoming a civil religion. It is the danger of believing that one country is more blessed by God than others, that one nation is at the forefront of advancing his kingdom on earth. This has been one of the great failures of the church throughout history.*[68]

Paul Hiebert, one of the leading missiological anthropologists of the 20th century, wrote of the necessity for cultural contextualization as people come to the truth of God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit with a strong opposition to the infusion of Western-norms in the contextualization process of the gospel and Scriptures into cultural life. He acknowledges that there is cultural syncretism in every cultural adaptation of Christianity as "built into every language are the implicit assumptions of the culture - the worldview of the people. There is no theologically unbiased language, no philosophically neutral worldview."[69] In fact he states that: "We must reject the relativism of the anticolonial era, but on what basis can we pass judgment on cultures without falling back into a colonial ethnocentrism? Anthropologists are increasingly aware that true participation with others at a deep level changes us."[70]

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[68] Hiebert, Transforming Worldviews, 285.
[69] Paul G. Hiebert, Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1994), 101–2.
[70] Hiebert, 69.

He proposes the idea that this process of change in our own worldview develops a *metacultural framework*.[71] "As we learn to see the world through the eyes of two cultures, we are forced to develop a metacultural framework above these cultures that enables us to see both cultures from without, and to compare them. We become inside participants in, and outside observers of, the cultures."[72] He argues that this "inside-outside" perspective enables translation processes between the two and is the grounds for an "objective vantage point from which to compare and judge them both."[73] This is one of the leading anthropological frameworks from the past century and it begins addressing the process of change and acknowledging the necessity to honor the truth, wisdom, and validity of another perspective or context.

However, this metacultural framework stops short of recognizing that in the process of change, one's vantage point no longer stays objective, as it is continually in the adaptive process of change through each new encounter with additional cultures. That is, Hiebert's metacultural framework is a helpful tool to view the necessity to oppose both a colonial era and anticolonial era mindset of judgment. Yet the desired objectivity can never fully be realized by any one individual as each encounter and own perspective as "inside participants" or of another's culture as an "outside observer" is viewed through one's ever-changing lens based on experience and exposure. This lens is continually adjusting based on encounters with various cultures and does not remain objective or ever fully 'outside' of any cultural viewpoint. While Hiebert's model and framework is helpful to recognize the necessity to critique one's own culture from within and also see and view another's culture more objectively, it is only one step in the ongoing process of

[71] See Chapter 5 Figure 5.1 for reference.
[72] Hiebert, 69.
[73] Hiebert, 69.

refining one's perception of self, other, and culture. There can never be a fully objective vantage point through which to view all cultures apart from God's unique perspective, which is beyond the full grasp of understanding from any human's comprehension. Additionally, being an "outside observer" does not necessitate an adjustment of one's own perspective upon encountering another culture. One might remain steadfast in one's own cultural viewpoint, judging and observing another culture without ever being refined in their own perspective.

Two cultures encountering each other should hopefully aid the growth process and refinement process of both, particularly between followers of Christ. There is, hopefully, a growing process of revealed perception and melding through listening and learning that happens as one's cultural vantage point does not remain stagnant if learning has actually taken place. There can perhaps be a stagnation of a vantage point if for example a person is only observing, but not learning nor allowing one's own framework to be adjusted to see from a new perspective. This pattern leads to alienation rather than assimilation or integration, the later which is often most ideal for holistic honoring and growth.

Hiebert's explanation of critical contextualization is a definition worth remembering and an excellent foundational platform through which to understand what is discussed when speaking of the revelations of faith through various cultural viewpoints which sharpen the understanding of the Kingdom of God at large for the Church. Hiebert defines critical contextualization as having four key components. The key components for critical contextualization is a balance of taking the Bible as the source for foundational guidance in all matters of life and faith, along with the recognition of "the

work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers open to God's leading,"[74] and the ongoing work of the church as "an international hermeneutical community."[75] These three components compose the final component as laid out by Hiebert, that over time the church grows to develop a consensus, a consensus that is not a static nor should it ever remain a static concept or articulation of theology. Rather this critical and essential hermeneutical community must see "contextualization as an ongoing process in which the church must constantly engage itself, a process that can lead us to a better understanding of what the lordship of Christ and the kingdom of God on earth are about."[76] It is only through the critical contextualization process that one can learn and see more readily what is true of the Kingdom of God and what has become an accepted enmeshment of cultural traditions with a specified cultural lens through which Scripture is read. It is not a casual benefit to participate in cross-cultural dialogues of theological nature and concrete critical contextualization endeavors. It is a necessity with which the refining and exposure of personal biases and cultural blindspots fails to happen without it. Without this intimate partnership with believers of other cultures, one is prone to the gluttonous idolatry of cultural prideful misunderstanding. Hiebert calls this type of gluttony out and states it as such:

> *We need each other to see our personal biases, for we see the ways others misinterpret Scriptures before we see our own misinterpretations. Along the same line, we need Christians from other cultures, for they often see how our cultural biases have distorted our interpretations of the Scriptures. This corporate nature of the church as a community of interpretation extends not only to the church in every culture, but also to the church in all ages…One can often see the sins of others better than his*

[74] Hiebert, 91.
[75] Hiebert, Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues, 91.
[76] Hiebert, 92.

> *or her own, and theologians can often detect the cultural biases of theologians from other cultures better than they can critique themselves.*[77]

While this statement might be readily agreed upon from an individualistic mindset, it is not just true of the individual. The same can be said about the collective entity and communal body of the church. Thus, it is not only an individual believer that needs to have partnership with believers from other cultures, but the entire entity of the church should be in a constant learning posture and be checked with the larger "international community of churches to test where theologies are too strongly influenced by cultural assumptions."[78]

The church today must examine itself for blindspots just as the early church had to formulate its own normative contextualization of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus upon engaging with different cultures of people seeking to know and follow Christ. Whether coming out of a Gentile cultural background context or coming out of a Jewish cultural background context, the faith of believers who were seeking to know and follow God, was challenged and forced to strip away traditions or misunderstandings from their ethnic backgrounds to keep the heart of the Truth of the Word of God. The Gentile push to disregard some of the Old Testament customs and symbolism, such as the circumcision of men, was a huge tension point for the early church, as this practice seemed essential to the gospel according to the Jewish interpretation of Jesus' teachings coming out of their Jewish background. Believers today readily accept the Gentile understanding that one can be circumcised in the heart and disregard the Jewish push for physical circumcision as a symbol of belonging to the people of God.

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[77] Hiebert, 91.
[78] Hiebert, 103.

Yet in the place of circumcision, other cultural traditional norms have arisen to become markers, and sometimes barriers, to delineate who belongs to the community of God. Again, here, just as in the early church, the Church needs to hear the theological interpretation of the gospel from brothers and sisters of different backgrounds in order to help dialogue and expose the heart of the Word of God and Truth of His Kingdom which is an absolute. His Kingdom is not relative, nor are His Truths relative. Therefore, one cannot disregard the effort to seek dialogue to pursue the ultimate absolutes of His Kingdom in the Unity of the Body of Believers. Only in the fullness of the Body of Believers coming together can all the angles of revelation can be compared and shine light on the gems which are authentically withstanding the test of time and culture, and those additional misinterpretations that blind of one's own misconceptions of what is cultural, what is sin, and what is grace.

It is essential for the growth and development of the Church to be constantly learning, growing, exposing, and strengthening itself until Christ returns. This sanctification of the Body of Christ is not for the Church alone, but in doing so, becomes a better window through which to reveal the truth of the Kingdom of God to the world. Disregarding this essential task of exfoliating the cultural components which are not of God from the Church does a disservice to those who are unaware of the Truth of God, as the picture they are given is a faded and distorted reflection of the beauty of the reality of God's beloved Kingdom.

One might argue that contextualization waters the gospel and removes the uniqueness of Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. However, to deny the uniqueness is to deny the gospel and to proclaim one's own cultural portrayal of Christ as the only

way to understand God properly. This is an arrogance to proclaim one's current framework and modern-day context as superior to any other human beings understanding as revealed by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures and through the world created by God our Creator. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, in his book *Foolishness to the Greeks*, addresses the Western world as if it were to encounter the gospel for the first time, highlighting the ways the Gospel would speak light, freedom, and truth into the darkness entangled into the Western culture. In this work, he specifically addresses the need to affirm the uniqueness of Christ in order for every culture to truly receive the gift of God purely rather than from a judged perspective of another cultured Christian. "To affirm the unique decisiveness of God's action in Jesus Christ is no arrogance; it is the enduring bulwark against the arrogance of every culture to be itself the criterion by which others are judged."[79]

Perhaps a helpful analogy to consider is the process of exfoliating theology between cultures. It is in the intimate rubbing of a Christian from Culture A with a Christian from Culture B, that the stripping off of enmeshed culture is made possible. Without this intimate and deliberate encounter, the dying life-less parts of Culture A Christian go unnoticed to the naked eye. It is through this exfoliation process that the pure refined and renewed essence of the Kingdom of God is separated from the grit of cultural syncretism and radiates more of the beauty it was intended to portray as a witness of God's Kingdom to the world.

A lot of this work needs to happen in the form of decolonizing Western theologies (or more specifically North Atlantic theologies) from their encroachment and infiltration

[79] Lesslie Newbigin, Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1986), 166.

into other cultures as final words on subjects, especially where there was not first a refining process in and of themselves as missionaries traversed the world. However, it is not Westerners alone who need to go through this process. The decolonization of majority White European- or North American- descended men's supremacy of theology needs to happen, absolutely yes. But the syncretism of faith and culture into theology and Christian faith practice is not an issue present in the Western church alone. Additionally, if majority world Christians do not learn from the mistake and arrogant neglect of international hermeneutical refining, another culturally specific interpretation might arise as the supreme authoritative interpretation of Scripture in the future, which would be a demise to all. Pride of the individual and collective pride is not owned by any particular cultural group, currently nor historically. The Western church's historic lack of engagement cross-culturally, for the sake of self-growth and corporate learning through refinement by intimate partnerships with other cultural theological believers, has abetted the rise of white supremacy in theological discourse in the Church. It is true that the Western church has contributed to significant financial and linguistic investment in the spread of the gospel, such as in projects of Bible translations.

However, the Western church's cultural syncretism which made their framework believe they had more to give than receive in cross-cultural partnerships has drastically stunted the growth of the North American church, a condition to which she is only now slowly awakening in the 21st century. This can be seen by the numerous Western missionaries sent across Africa, including to Rwanda and South Africa, who saw racial biases cause violence, divisions, and even the apartheid, and yet returned home without bringing home the same essentialness of lament, repentance, and radical asking of

forgiveness to move towards authentic reconciliation offered through the Gospel in their homelands. For American missionaries in particular, the same hope they shared and saw local believers exhibit in the face of worldly evils and atrocities to bring healing for racial divisions, reparations, and true reconciliation on a communal level was neglected from their view of their own nation for past violence towards indigenous peoples, for slavery, for Japanese internment camps, for Jim Crow laws, and ongoing forms of systemic racism in the USA.

Similarly, American missionaries sent to the Middle East, sharing the hope of Christ and encouraging many, yet those who sent them or even upon return themselves did not return with the devout separation of church and state, clinging to Christ and His Kingdom over any political ideology offered by politicians, officials, and remaining steadfast against nationalistic idolatry for the sake of Christ's Kingdom. These glimpses of the Kingdom through embodied Gospel life, among many other stories that various missionaries observed from Global Church brethren could have changed, and still could change, the formation and trajectory of Christianity in North America if brought home as a lesson learned from the Global Church, humbly received and learnt from, aiding the building up of the North American Church to pursue righteousness as learned from siblings across the world.

In a recent work on the shifting of paradigms in elenctics from a guilt-innocence to shame-honor model, missiologist Christopher Flanders gives a strategic argument calling for a change in the theology and understanding of elenctics in the Western world. It is from his own study of the subject, particularly of the Greek word *elengchein*, including learning from Te-Li Lau's recent work on shame in Paul's writings, that raised

awareness of how previous missiologists had misinterpreted the Scripture due to preconceived cultural interpretations, such as the Western legal framework, that was more naturally ingrained. Not only does Flanders' perspective change, but he advocates the necessity of adjustment from the Western worldview on this matter at large. In his article, he points out the previous stances on elenctics from the Western male perspective, yet concludes with:

> *My purpose is not to disparage or unduly critique these men. It is, however, to point out how easily Western interpreters slip the notion of guilt into our understands of what it means to convict. It's more likely that our notions of what constitutes conviction have been profoundly shaped by our Western social, legal, and philosophical presuppositions. This influential Western-legal framework leads us to miss shame dynamics that are present in scripture, and assume there to be a consistent case of guilt dynamics. This seems to be evident with elenctics*[80].

Te-Li Lau, a believer from a shame-honor oriented background himself, shares deep scholarly reflections on the various types of shame, including "shaming refutation"[81], an analysis of Paul's use of the word *elengchein*, and extensive summaries of the shame/guilt thought processes in other Hebraic and Jewish text. He highlights that in the Old Testament the concept of guilt was of actions that broke YHWH's moral code-guilt-culpability- not merely feelings of guilt. In contrast, Lau discusses how shame, when in relation to the salvific work of God "the subjective experience of objective guilt…deep regret, sorrow, and compunction for past moral failings."[82] The widening of perspective of understanding, on this one minute detail, is a glimpse of the plethora of

[80] Christopher Flanders, "Bringing Shame upon an Honored Missiological Paradigm: A Study of Conviction and Elenctics," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 37, no. 3–4 (Fall/Winter 2020): 125.
[81] Te-Li Lau, *Defending Shame: Its Formative Power in Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020), 37–59.
[82] Lau, 86.

other deeper readings of Scriptures, or putting faith into practice across the nations depending on the cultural framework and lens brought to the text or faith in the first place. It would be prudent for all academics and learners to recognize their own biases or cultural assumptions upon approaching others to know how they receive and speak to communicate or understand in conversing with others.

A first step is to stop and listen to siblings, brothers and sisters in the faith, to *aile* (family) to hear how their unique culture portrays the hope, truth, and picture of the Kingdom of God. For the sake of bite sized pieces, this thesis will only briefly address a few lessons learned from listening to brothers and sisters in the Turkish and Ugandan churches. This is only a tiny drop in the bucket of learning, even from among these churches themselves, and definitely only one step in learning to lean in to hear and see more of the Kingdom of God through the Global Church at large. Let the exfoliation process of our own syncretic culturally formed theological views begin as we move into chapters 3 and 4 as "*aile* listening around the *ekyoto"*.

Chapter 3

Contributions from the Turkish Church

> *Those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, Cypriot and Cyrenian men, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Hellenists, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord…Then [Barnabas] went to Tarsus to search for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*
>
> *— Acts 11:19-21,25 NLT*

The history and patterns of growth regarding the proclamation of the Kingdom of God in Turkey has had its ebbs and flows over the years but with similar threads throughout. These threads include a remnant of believers being called Christians since the early church began, God bringing new life through foreigners' investment, ethnic divisions being united and healed through the power of our Lord Jesus, persecution leading to proclamation and revival, and unique aspects of Turkish culture embodying the Gospel to extend His Kingdom through hospitality, presence, and faithfulness. From the earliest arrival of Jesus followers to the city of Antioch, ethnic distinctions were made as far as who might receive and accept the good news of Jesus, and who it was assumed would not (Acts 11:19). The tributaries of ethnic division have run deep in the Middle East and Asia minor for centuries[83] among every tribe, language, and people group that has documented their history in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. The reality that Jews were fearing of non-Jews (Gentiles) in the 1st century, having been

[83] Munther Isaac, The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020), 6. The Old Testament and other ancient Hebraic texts such as Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged, New updated ed (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987).

persecuted themselves, should not surprise anyone, especially those who live in MENA and have seen the ongoing persecution of Jesus followers for centuries.

The stories of the good news of Jesus have often traveled within ethnic lines of relationships in Turkey, where even today the Archbishop of Constantinople, one of the longest standing ecumenical positions in the Global Church, leads a congregation of Eastern Orthodox believers with primarily Greek and Armenian family backgrounds. In the early Church, it was no different. The Jews who knew the good news of Jesus felt the freedom, and perhaps also the ethno-solidarity of protection or preference, to reach out to fellow Jews. However, the Holy Spirit did what the Holy Spirit always does and broke through socially constructed segregations and ethnicities to bring forth the powerful healing of unity and new life in Christ Jesus, to offer hope to those who might believe in Him as Lord.

The first missionaries to Antioch, which today is known as Antakya in modern day Turkey, were African men from Cyrene in Libya and Cyprian men from Cyprus, who crossed up to thirteen hundred kilometers of land and sea[84] to bring the good news of Jesus to the Hellenist Gentiles, those who were ethnically and religiously different from them. The understanding of God's desire for all men and women, regardless of tribal lines or ethnic heritage, to know the power, presence, hope, truth, and good news of Jesus Christ was deep in the hearts and minds of these Cyrenian and Cypriot believers. This propelled them beyond what societal and cultural mandates regarding who should be welcomed into the fold of family and who is always an outsider. This seed of faithfulness from the first missionaries as told in Acts 11 and their willingness to cross over ethnic divides and to proclaim unity, grace, forgiveness, hope, and a new tribal

[84] Africa Study Bible., 2016, 1600. Acts 11:20

identity through the reconciliatory outstretched arms on the cross of Jesus Christ is what brought forth the first spiritual awakening and growth of people in the land of Turkey. No longer were people primarily identified as Jews or Gentiles in Antioch, but they inherited a higher calling to be One in the Body of Christ as Christians, as Christ followers. This healing power of the Name of Jesus Christ to bring together those who are far and those who are near,[85] to weave together into one family of God those whose bloodlines have been at war in deep prejudice and hatred for millennia, continues to be one of the testimonies of believers in Turkey today. Ephesians 2:11-22 was written to the church of Ephesus, along the western coast of Turkey, and is just as applicable to the Kingdom proclamation of the Gospel in Turkey today.

One of the seemingly unanimous voices raised across the Turkish Protestant Church is the thankfulness for the long-term foreigners who come to bring the Gospel to Turkey and aid the growth of the Turkish Church.[86] The Turkish Protestant Church is a network of churches from small house churches to larger city gatherings in church buildings and stands alongside the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Catholic Church in Turkey. The majority of believers in the Turkish Protestant Church are Muslim-background converts.[87] However, there are also several churches which are composed of majority Armenian or Assyrian background believers, rather than Muslim-converts.[88] Due to the historic nature of religious tensions perpetrating war between

[85] Ephesians 2:17
[86] Gathered from the interviews taken and conversations held with locals during the course of writing this thesis, including but not limited to Pastor Emre, Pastor Ara, Melinda, as well as supported in writings such as Ziya Meral, No Place to Call Home: Experiences of Apostates from Islam, Failures of the International Community (United Kingdom: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 2008).
[87] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre, Zoom, February 23, 2021. Due to security issues for these pastors interviewed, their names have been given aliases for this thesis.
[88] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre; Pastor Ara, March 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Ara, Zoom, March 17, 2021.

Christian and Muslim nations in the region, fears of suspicion, deep ethnic hate, and unhealed generational trauma has echoed down through the centuries.[89] It is a deep-seated sin that the blood of Christ has been healing through His people, and while work has been done, there is still more to do. The ecumenical churches have been healing as One Body this past half-century, offering glimpses of hope, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation which stands in stark contrast to the staunch nationalistic and religious majority convictions which perpetrate division, violence, and gas-lighting oppression of the other.

It was nearing the verge of World War I that Turkey finally gained its independence as a Republic after the overthrow of the Ottoman Sultan in 1908 led by the Young Turks.[90] Following the epic loss of territory and solidarity in one week during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the Young Turks changed course from pursuing equality in their lands for all people groups and desired an "homogenization of Anatolia…openly declared their Turk-ism"[91] and joined forces with Germany against the Balkans and Russia at the wake of WWI. Originally, the Armenians were in agreement for equality with the Young Turks and supported the overthrowing of the Sultan.[92] However, due to the betrayal of support from the Balkans, with this new policy and mindset, they forcibly started to remove those they saw as traitors who were allied with the Russians and those who were Christians through what the Western world refers to as the Armenian genocide

[89] See Appendix A for brief history of 20th century Greeks, Armenians, and Turks under Ottoman Empire and transitioning to current day nation states. Also, Isaac, The Other Side of the Wall, 6 gives a brief overview of Empire exchanges from Assyrians to Ottomans in the Middle Eastern Region with tensions due to religion as well as politic powers.
[90] The Young Turks and the Armenians: From Revolution to Genocide, Video, Facing History & Ourselves (Turkey). See Appendix A for brief history of Young Turks and Armenians during beginning of 20th century up until 1925, documentary by Turkish Scholar Taner Akçam.
[91] The Young Turks and the Armenians: From Revolution to Genocide, Video, Facing History & Ourselves (Turkey). Scholar Taner Akçam.
[92] The Young Turks and the Armenians: From Revolution to Genocide.

beginning in 1915.[93] Turkey became its own nation state as a Republic following the 1st World War in 1925. This is part of the foundation of the nation within which believers from Armenian, Greek, Kurdish, and Turkish ethnic heritage lines live and call home.

The arrival of foreigners brought the Gospel to Turks, similar to the arrival of the Cyrene men from Libya and Cyprians from Cyprus which brought the Gospel to the non-Jewish people of Antioch. While the Gospel had been present in some communities in 20th century Turkey, as scattered and persecuted believers had already been there witnessing and standing firm in faith, yet remaining within their own ethnic communities as there were deep divides and distrust between the Armenians, Greeks, and Turks living in the land. As the remaining Armenians and Greeks healed from the Ottoman Young Turks' desire for a majority Muslim people group in the land as they fought for independence as a nation state following 1925, they held great suspicion of any Turk who presented inquiry into the Christian faith. Any Muslim who expressed interest in learning about Jesus as Lord as more than just a prophet was disregarded or feared as a potential infiltrator into the Christian community as up until the 1980s, all Christians were non-Turks,[94] and following the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars, Turks saw all Christians as traitors.

It is a well-known saying in Turkish culture that "To be Turkish is to be Muslim, and to be Muslim is to be a Turk." Anyone from another nation is automatically questioned. If someone is non-Turkish but a Muslim, especially a fellow practicing Sunni- the majority of Muslims in Turkey- they are welcomed as a brother or sister in Islam. If they are non-Turkish and non-Muslim from a far-away foreign land of

[93] History.com Editors, "Armenian Genocide," HISTORY, October 1, 2010, https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/armenian-genocide.
[94] Melinda, February 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Melinda, Zoom, February 17, 2021; February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre; Pastor Ara, March 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Ara.

European descent, such as Germany, Canada, the USA, or the UK, they are seen as foreigners and treated as respected visitors so long as no one proselytizes. However, if one is Turkish and non-Muslim, they are rejected as a traitor and apostate.[95]

One of the pillars of the Turkish Protestant Church today is one of the elders (a Barnabas figure if you will) who will be called Pastor Emre for security reasons. Pastor Emre, one of the oldest Muslim-converts to Christianity in the Turkish Protestant Church today, is now overseeing an area of small house churches. In an interview, he shared the beginnings of his own faith in following Jesus, as well as the start of the Turkish Protestant Church:

> *Well, I came to know Jesus back in 1987. And I was a university student at that time. So in İstanbul, we were just a handful of believers, you know, very young and very inexperienced, let me say. [It] was…uh…surprising- even though it was a handful of Christians just coming together trying to meet find their own way in Christ, there was a lot of at that time, oppression. For example, from my own mother: she took me into the newspapers, she dragged me into the police, and it was it was very difficult, you know. But you know, those who were faithful, the number few number of Christians who remained faithful, we started the first, I would say, evangelical church for Turkish people, you know, with Muslim backgrounds. I mean, we had, of course, churches: Armenian churches and Syrian churches at that time, evangelical churches at that time, but for those of us, for Turks I mean, it was the first church in in Turkey it's called: Turkish Protestant Church. (February 23, 2021)*[96]

From the beginnings of the Early Church until the 20th century, when the Turkish Protestant Church commenced, God has been faithfully with those who believe and trust in the Lord Jesus. Carrying them through persecutions, sustaining them under Islamic governing authorities, moving their hearts in repentance for atrocities of the past to lead forth in healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation for a hurting and wounded extended

[95] Ziya Meral, No Place to Call Home: Experiences of Apostates from Islam, Failures of the International Community, 68.
[96] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.

community living in the land of what is now Turkey. It is from their story and example, from martyrdom to confession as sinners, that the renewing and rebuilding of the witness of the Body of Christ is being resurrected in Turkey today.

The Remnant of Believers called Christians since Early Church

Upon reflecting on the question of what the Church in Turkey can offer to the Global Church, Pastor Ara[97] was eager to share many things, beginning with some of the earliest encounters of the goodness of Jesus for the people living in the lands of modern day Turkey. Pastor Ara's ancestors were of Christian Armenian descent from the lands of Eastern Anatolia, part of the 10% remnant that survived.

> *Unfortunately, [when] many theologians, many church historians think, they think of the church in the West you know, but they neglect the church in the East. Remember Paul, St. Paul from Antioch, he went to the West you know to Anatolia, but nobody thinks of the Eastern [growth]. But at the same time the church was growing in the Eastern when the two disciples of Christ Jesus came to Edessa, Urfa now, at the time the King: the fifth Abgar- beşinci Abgar."*[98] *The fifth Abgar was exceedingly eager to meet Jesus from what he had heard from his ambassador. Accordingly, "The pains of the beşinci Abgar was leprosy. One of his ambassadors, was called Ananias, went to Jerusalem, and when he came back with excitement said, 'My king! I heard somebody called Jesus! And he's healing people without medicine!' Then he was [with] excitement wrote a letter to Jesus, you know, ask him to come to his kingdom and that '[there] is enough for me and for you', like that but Jesus didn't go. He sent two disciples to him and they came when Jesus went to heaven. They came and they prayed on him and he was healed completely! Himself and all his people became a Christian- that was AD 33. And from there they went to Adiyaman, Malatya, Diyarbakır, Mardin, and then to Iraq, and from Iraq to Iran, from Iran they went to Central Asia- explaining the gospels and in the first, second, and third, centuries monasteries and churches were built [in eastern Turkey] and these are all neglected by the Westerners. (March 17, 2021)*[99]

[97] Pastor Ara's name has also been changed for security reasons.
[98] Beşinci Abgar means 'fifth Abgar' or Abgar V in Turkish.
[99] March 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Ara.

Even beyond the written text of the New Testament, there are oral and written records of early beginnings during the same period of Jesus' life, that word of Jesus' miraculous works and healings were making news in Edessa, part of the Kingdom of Osroene then situated on the northern side of Mesopotamia in modern-day southeastern Turkey, the story of the 5th Abgar (Ukkāmā, meaning 'the Black' in Syriac and Assyrian) as retold by Pastor Ara during a March 17th, 2021 Zoom interview. Pastor Ara shared how the King of Osroene, upon hearing of the works and teachings of Jesus and threats to him by locals, invited Jesus to join him in his kingdom.[100]

Some scholars debate the validity of this story. However, the mosaics on the inside of churches and monasteries depicting this event, which dates back to the 1st century, are a testament of the presence of the Gospel being brought into the Kingdom of Osroene (132 BC to AD 244) prior to the journeys of Paul and Barnabas.[101] The exact exchange of letter writing between Abgar V[102] and Jesus' dictated reply, circulated around the early church, although there have also been some who remain skeptical.[103] Yet with the long standing oral traditions upholding it remain at large on if Jesus actually had a letter written in response to the Abgar's request. A letter supposedly written was taken to be held as a relic at the Church of the Virgin of Pharos in Constantinople for several centuries, before the Church was destroyed by the Latin invaders. In addition to the letter, it is recorded and known that Abgar V's conversion, one of the earliest kings to convert to Christianity, came through the spreading of the Gospel through Apostle

[100] Appendix B- Letter of the Abgar
[101] Pastor Ara, March 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Ara; Daily Sabah, "Rare 1st-Century Mosaic Unearthed in Southeastern Turkey," *Daily Sabah*, October 27, 2016, https://www.dailysabah.com/history/2016/10/27/rare-1st-century-mosaic-unearthed-in-southeastern-turkey.
[102] Abgar V was king of Edessa from (AD 17 - 50AD).
[103] See Appendix B for a copy of the letter exchanged and passed down for generations; Pastor Ara.

Thaddeus of Edessa, one of the seventy sent out by Christ Jesus, and tradition has it that upon hearing of Apostle Thaddeus' presence in his land, Abgar V invited him with the anticipation that he was the disciple Jesus had promised to send.[104]

While exact numbers vary between local pastors and global researchers such as the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) and Pew Research, all agree that currently there are less than 0.2% Christians out of the 80+ million population in Turkey.[105] During a transatlantic Zoom interview on February 23rd, 2021 when speaking with Pastor Emre, he shared that since the 1970s, the Turkish Protestant Church has steadily grown from less than 10 believers, to an estimated 6,000-9,000[106] believers out of the roughly 80 million people in the nation. Pastor Ara estimates Muslim-background believers in the Turkish Protestant Church is double that, with between 15,000-20,000 Protestant believers in Turkey today of Turkish or Kurdish background. Pastor Ara also has a wider grasp of the Armenian, Greek, and Syrian Orthodox believing communities, and local Catholics in the nation, perhaps in part due to his own Armenian and Syrian background. He states that there are roughly 40,000-45,000 Armenian Orthodox, 10,000 Syrian Orthodox, 3,000 Greek Orthodox, and 4,000 Catholics. Both Pastor Emre and Pastor Ara quote there being 160 house or large church gatherings for the Turkish Protestant believers, a remarkable flame of remnant and faithful believers in an otherwise

[104] Orthodox Church in America, "Apostle Thaddeus of the Seventy" (Orthodox Church in America), https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2011/08/21/102355-apostle-thaddeus-of-the-seventy; Daily Sabah, "Rare 1st-Century Mosaic Unearthed in Southeastern Turkey"; Interview with Pastor Ara.
[105] See Appendix C. Center for the Study of Global Christianity, "Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970-2020," pdf (Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, June 2013), 42–43, https://archive.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf; Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, "Turkey," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project (Pew Research Center, 2016), http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/turkey#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2020&region_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2016.
[106] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.

dominated Muslim culture. Despite the millennia of persecution from other Christians and non-Christians alike, there has remained a faithful few like embers of the fire of the Holy Spirit, eager to see growth and new life flourish again across the lands that once were the foundations of the Early Church.

Christians in this land of Turkey have withstood trials, violence, attempts of oppression through high taxation due to their religious beliefs, and erosion of their communities throughout the centuries since the Early Church. From the time of Justinian I, the Arab Caliphate, Seljuk Turks, Western Roman Crusaders, Ottomans, and Young Turks to present day governing authorities, wave after wave of discrimination and violence has emerged at varying degrees.[107] Each of these attempts, such as the Western Roman Catholic Church's mandate of the 11th and 13th century crusades seeking a church-state military mandated capturing of Edessa, Antioch, and Constantinople and the Seljuk Turks and Byzantine Empire quest to 'reclaim' great cities for the Western church Christendom, wiped out hundreds and thousands of local believers who were not of the Western Roman Catholic tradition. Eastern Orthodox believers of Greek or Armenian background were especially devastated as churches, monasteries, and Christian libraries were burned to the ground during these military crusades.

1204 AD marks the Sack of Constantinople during the 4th Crusade, where due to greed and exiled Byzantine men desiring to be kings, the 4th Crusade stopped pushing against the Muslims and sought to attack, capture, and pillage Constantinople, including

[107] Konstantin Aleksandrovič Pančenko, Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans: 1516-1831, trans. Brittany Pheiffer Noble and Samuel Noble (Jordanville, New York: Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2016) p.10,66,192; Anna G. Edmonds, Turkey's Religious Sites, 1st ed. (Istanbul: Damko, 1997) p.67-71; Adrian Hastings, ed., A World History of Christianity (Grand Rapids, Michigan Cambridge, U.K: Eerdmans, 2000) p.67,95-96.

the complete robbing and emptying of Christian churches like the Haghia Sophia.[108] The city was stripped, as women were brutally raped and many were attacked, and this sacking was not by Muslims but by fellow Christians. Ecumenical historians state that centuries of letters, books, and historical documents of the early church were destroyed in this 4th Crusade.[109] Eastern European researcher and theologian Peter Kuzmic states that: "Western Christianity had broken the Eastern Orthodox spirit, as Constantinople was the capital of the Eastern Orthodox Church".[110] So many lost their lives, and those that remained were devastated as they had received attacks from both Muslims and Christians alike, not knowing how their future would be upheld or what their culture, people group, and faith would look like moving forward.

It was not just Christians from other traditions and regions of the world that killed local believers. There was also persecution from the Muslims of various people groups as well. From the Seljuk Turks, to the Ottoman Turks, Young Turks, and other Muslims in the lands of those with Kurdish or Assyrian background, the fight to keep their land free from anyone who would not proclaim the *shahadah,* the first and most important pillar of Islam as it bears witness to Allah and the prophet Muhammed as his messenger,[111] was their primary strategy in order to keep a strong land with Islamic majority and values. For Muslims, rejecting the *shahadah* is an act of apostasy and a reason for arrest or banishment from the community and state. Following WWI, this same strategy was used

[108] Thomas Whittenmore, "The Unveiling of the Byzantine Mosaics in Haghia Sophia Istanbul," Archaeological Institute of America 46, no. 2 (June 1942): 169.
[109] Peter Kuzmic, "Eastern Orthodoxy from Empire to Empire" (Lecture, Evangelical Perspectives of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, March 8, 2019).
[110] Peter Kuzmic.
[111] Muhammed Abdul Haq, "The Meaning and Significance of the Shahadah," Islamic Studies 23, no. 3 (1984): 171.

to try to keep a strong nationalistic independent state when the borders of the modern Middle East region were divided up by victorious Europeans powers in the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement.[112]

The Fall of Constantinople in 1453 marked the second largest attack on the city, one that turned the predominant religion of the city from Christian to Muslim under the governing authorities to this day. Several of the largest historical churches, such as Haghia Sophia, have since been converted to mosques, and Haghia Irene which was incorporated into the Topkapi Palace gardens, the residence of the Ottoman emperors, now sits as a museum.

One of the earliest targeted killings of Christians for their faith during this time was by the Ottomans in response to seeing the vast array of iconography in the Eastern Orthodox Churches.[113] Islamic tradition believes that any painting, drawn, or craved image can lead to idolatry where the image rather than the divine being (Allah for Muslims) would become the focus of worship and thus is idolatry which is one of the greatest sins for Muslims.[114] Thus, the war on iconoclasm began and some Christians put their lives on the line, declaring they would rather die than watch their icons be destroyed and stripped out of their churches. Ruling Muslims under the Ottoman Empire would also give greater taxes to non-Muslim citizens living in the land.[115] Many nominal Christians converted to Islam during Ottoman rule when they saw the greater freedoms and protection offered to those who would declare the *shahadah.* Due to memories of

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[112] Mirjam E. Sørli, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Håvard Strand, "Why Is There So Much Conflict in the Middle East?", The Journal of Conflict Resolution 49, no. 1 (2005): 146.
[113] Peter Kuzmic, "Eastern Orthodoxy from Empire to Empire."
[114] Lumen Learning, "Introduction to Islamic Art," Boundless Art History, 2020. Courseware Chapter on Islamic Art, accessed June 30, 2021.
[115] The Young Turks and the Armenians: From Revolution to Genocide; Pančenko, Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans.

Christian ransacking, there was not much hope for support from fellow Christians beyond their lands, and so the numbers dwindled with oppression from all sides. To this day, social pressures can still lead to a renouncing of faith or weakening of courage from sharing the gospel as many have experienced job loss, being disowned by family, and received threats of violence.[116]

Greek and Armenian background believers made up the highest percentage of remaining Christians in Turkey at the turn of the 20th century, making up close to 25% of the entire population at the start of WWI around 1915.[117] As in all of history, differing sides state differing causes such as the reason for the start of the deportation and massacres of the Armenians from the land which is now known as Turkey. From the Turkish majority perspective, the Young Turks, after being betrayed by the Balkan Christians, were wary of the Greek and Armenian Christians living in their shared land, especially those in Eastern Anatolia. The Young Turks had chosen to side with Germany. There was military fighting in order to protect the Ottoman land of Eastern Anatolia and a desire to "remove Armenians from the war zone area" while they were fighting the Russians (USSR) or anyone who allied with the Russians against the Central Powers, including Armenia.[118] They state that they were pushing back invaders from the Northeast corner who were encroaching into their territory, fending off the Russian super powers that were seeking to gain control of the Black Sea region.

The mass graves of Armenian bodies, statistical data recorded of population size decreases, and countless stories from the surviving generations tell another story. That

[116] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre; Melinda, February 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Melinda; Pastor Ara, March 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Ara.
[117] History.com, "Armenian Genocide."
[118] The Young Turks and the Armenians: From Revolution to Genocide.

the conflict was more than just a military war; women and children and elderly were also found dead. Graves of bodies were found not just along the Turkish-Armenian border where they might have lain under land-dispute territory, but also through the mountainous region on the eastern side of the nation, scattered along a route from the north-eastern corner down to the south-eastern corner near the border with Syria. Even in Western Turkey, in major cities like İstanbul and İzmir, the population of Armenians and Greeks was reduced drastically from over 2 million to less than 200,000 Armenians.[119] Both Greece and Armenia saw influxes of people arriving in their lands who shared their ethnic heritage, but had never lived there before. Because the Allies won WWI, the Russian and Armenian story has been told across the world, with the oral histories remaining strong in support of what is globally referred to as the Armenian genocide. However, to this day, it is censored and is not discussed, written about, nor acknowledged in Turkish history books beyond a description of fighting for protection of land and resistance from the Russians and Allies as Ottoman Turks. The Young Turks policy of 10% non-Muslims in their land was also a strong contributing factor that lead to the removal, pressured conversion of, or intermarrying with Christian women such that by sharia law all descendants of Muslim fathers are automatically declared Muslim upon birth.

The year of 1925 marks the year of Turkish national independence from the Ottoman Empire, when the Young Turks took control and established an independent republic under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk. As the nationalistic identity further developed through the joint identity that to be 'Turkish was to be Muslim' and anyone

[119] The Young Turks and the Armenians: From Revolution to Genocide; History.com, "Armenian Genocide."

else was a traitor to the nation, Christians continued to be a minority. As of 2016, there was roughly 2.5-5% of the Turkish Armenian population who continue to reside in Turkey compared to what once was in at the beginning of the 20th century.[120] This is the terrain in which the Patriarch of Constantinople continued to care pastorally for his congregants through. With every change of ruling power, by the grace of God, both the Patriarch and Archbishop's seats remained untouched and unchallenged. A small remnant of Armenian, Greek, and Syrian Orthodox remained faithful amidst the challenges and persecutions.

When writing about the decreasing remnant of believers in Turkey, as well as across the Middle East in general, Jenkins references two major historical events:

> *The modern concept of genocide . . . has its roots in the thoroughly successful movements to eradicate Middle Eastern Christians. . . . The decline of Christianity in the Middle East occurred in two distinct phases, two distinct 'falls'. In the first, in what Europeans call the Middle Ages, Christians lost their majority status within what became Muslim-majority nations . . . In the second phase, however, which is barely a century old, Christians have ceased to exist altogether – are ceasing to exist – as organized communities. We can argue about the causes of that change, whether they can legitimately be described as religious rather than political, but the result was to create a Muslim world that was just as Christian-free as large sections of Europe would be Jew-free after the Second World War. In both instances, the major mechanism of change was the same. For all the reasons we can suggest for long-term decline, for all the temptations to assimilate, the largest single factor for Christian decline was organized violence, whether in the form of massacre, expulsion, or forced migration . . . Although some rulers were more explicitly motivated by religion than others, the Ottomans were often more aggressively anti-Christian than were the original Arab conquerors of the Middle East.*[121]

This is also the soil which foreign missionaries arrived onto in the late 20th century. In particular, missionaries from the West came and did not find any Christians or believers

[120] Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, "Turkey"; History.com, "Armenian Genocide."
[121] Philip Jenkins, The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia--and How It Died, 1st ed (New York, NY: Harper One, 2008), 140–42.

in any of the major cities across Turkey.[122] Specifically, these were Protestant missionaries with evangelical backgrounds, so they were looking for evangelical Protestants in particular. Still, with less than 5% of the population claiming anything but Islam as their faith, it was not easy. For foreign workers, it was through sacrificial love and a willingness to resist the police, government, and authorities or be arrested for the sake of the hope of Jesus Christ (not counting imprisonment or martyrdom for their faith as a reason to deny Christ) that was a testimony of the power of the Holy Spirit which is alive and living in them. Through prayer, persecution, and peace building with locals, the seeds of the Turkish Church of Muslim background believers started to grow alongside the wounded but healing Eastern Church.

God Bringing New Life through Foreign Investment

From the missional movement recorded in Acts and the New Testament letters to the churches in Revelation till the 21st century, cross-cultural sharing of the good news of Jesus abounds. In Acts, Cyrenian and Cypriot men, followed by Barnabas, Paul, Silas, and Luke journey from their homelands of North Africa, Cyprus, and Judea, for the sake of bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to local Jews and Hellenists across Cappadocia, Galatia, the outskirts of Asia, to Troas and Ephesus (all currently in modern-day Turkey). Their North African, Cyprian, Jewish, and Roman or Greek heritage backgrounds did not prevent them from sharing the gospel with the people of Antioch or others across the lands of now modern-day Turkey. In a similar way, every local Turkish and Armenian pastor, when reflecting on the history and growth of the current day Turkish Protestant

[122] Melinda, February 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Melinda; February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.

Church, speaks about the investment of long-term missionaries from Korea, Canada, the UK and the USA as an essential part of the establishment of the Turkish Church.[123] While there are mixed feelings and many issues with short-term missionaries or teams, the majority of families or individuals who moved and made Turkey their own homeland, investing in the lives of locals for decades for the sake of becoming one spiritual family, have had a profound impact on the revival and the sowing of seeds for an indigenous church planting movement alongside locals. Some of these families or individuals have even experienced persecution and martyrdom alongside their local believing peers for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of this has been holy seeds for revival, springing forth waves of new life, more turning to Jesus as Lord, and deeper roots of faith for those who already believe.

> *So I mean, these people, the early workers are the missionaries, they were like, they're like my heroes, because they came to nothing. They came to nothing. I mean, no churches, amount Turks, no Turkish preachers, no Turkish teachers, not Turkish evangelists. So I mean, imagine that starting up from the scratch. So that was, so the experience was something like that, you know, just have to start up something. And so now looking back, some claim that, you know, there's like 6000 Turkish Christians today, some believe 9000 Turkish Christians today. And I believe that the truth is somewhere in between, but let me tell you that this is based on churches, you know, so churches kind of send the report to an organization here called Silas. And so that's, that's what it's based on. But there are so many Christians that don't go to churches. And then there are closed Christians who are not able to yet express themselves as Christians, because they fear that they would lose their families or their jobs or their place placed in the community. So, so the exact figure, I don't know. But the kind of estimate would be like 6000 - 9000, and maybe even more, hopefully, more. So I mean, if you compare it to what it was, like, in the 70s, there has been an exponential growth. You know, but if you compare it to the population, which is over 80 million people, it's a drop in the ocean, still. (February 23, 2021)*[124]

[123] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre; Pastor Ara, March 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Ara; Melinda, February 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Melinda; Ziya Meral, *No Place to Call Home: Experiences of Apostates from Islam, Failures of the International Community*.
[124] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.

In particular, one long-term family was highlighted by Pastor Emre. He was very close to this family for many years and established deep life-on-life trust through discipleship and mentorship investment from them. This family had given birth, raised, and blessed their children off to schools in other nations for higher education and called Turkey home. They were deeply rooted in the Turkish church community for the sake of mutual learning and encouragement. They sought to be a witness and encourage the local leaders while also receiving spiritual support and encouragement from their brothers and sisters in the congregation. Pastor Emre spoke highly of this particular couple who were a well-known and beloved family by foreigners and locals alike. He had been mentored by them, loves them, and respects them very much. When Pastor Emre felt called to start a new church plant for Turkish believers, he asked if they would join him. He recognized their gifts and strengths were ideal for working alongside many of the local believers because they showed vulnerability and had a healthy example of marriage. It was an anomaly for others coming out of Turkish background cultures to speak honestly about struggles in their marriage and also not having an abusive marriage of any sort. As servant leaders, their presence gave support to rising leaders and encouragement. They came alongside and under the local leadership to be participants in small groups or services as equal parts.

For the sake of investing in the church in ways Pastor Emre knew the church needed, they were the only foreigners invited into that new Turkish church plant. They were gifted where he was not and he appreciated their posture and saw the fruit of their presence in the lives of many others seeking after God. Their gentleness, joy, hospitality, and love permeated every conversation. But in particular, Pastor Emre appreciated their

authenticity and willingness to share vulnerably about their struggles and their need for prayer. He speaks of their strong marriage which has lasted over 45 years and how they are still willing to ask for prayer when there was a disagreement or they needed wisdom to discern something. This is just one of many examples. There are others who are applauded for learning the language to teach and preach in Turkish although Korean or European or American by birth. There are many who spent decades working alongside the Turks to translate the Hebrew and Greek texts directly into Turkish rather than via an English translation. Others still brought theology courses and mentored and encouraged Turkish leaders so that a Turkish church led by locals could arise and lead itself in the future.

While the investment from foreign workers was welcome, there are also many frustrations because of the cultural syncretism that foreigners blindly brought with them. One of the biggest blindspots of cultural syncretism that Western or South Korean Christian missionaries still bring with them and was a negative hindrance to the witness of Christ across Turkey were dozens of splintering denominations and an apparent 'need' for missionaries from yet another Protestant denomination to come and plant a church as if there were no real churches nor real witness of Christ in Turkey yet. These denominational differences among foreigners was a hindrance that local Turkish believers had issue with when they sought to build their own Turkish Church identity and heard conflicting voices trying to guide them in their North Atlantic rooted preferences and interpretations. Pastor Ara speaks of being welcomed to attend a leaders' council gathering of foreign missionary workers. He shared his heart on this issue with them so that they could hear clearly how it has been affecting the local believers:

> *Friends, when you come from your country, America, Germany, England. Don't bring your culture. Don't bring your denomination. Come and help us like John the Baptist- come and clean the way. Embrace us, teach us, pray for us. But if you come and bring your denominations, there will be divisions and splits. Don't do this. (March 17, 2021)* [125]

Upon further reflection while sharing this in the interview he added:

> *[I was] Glad that they came, they had money, could print books for distribution. Their money helped with some projects. But the dangers they did was this: they would come to a church and go there, if they saw one or two very important and active believers, they talked to them [privately] to leave and join the foreigners to plant a new church. They would come and do their own church, they wouldn't focus on any other church, only focus on one particular church."* (Shaking his head he continued:) *"Every believer is a missionary according to what God gave him or her. If God called you to a country, you should accept every Christian there as an equal brother or sister. If God gives you a gift of healing, go to every church and heal. If evangelical, work with every kind of Christian and bless them. If you focus on one or two people and neglect the others, this is not good. They came did these things, and it was not good. The original job of a missionary is to spend every day, 6hrs on his knees for that country and for the church. Accept them all together. Modern missionaries are different- [they are] busy writing reports and books, but something else needs to happen if you [are] there. Go visit in their homes, in their need, in the hospitals and BE WITH THEM. Romans 6-12, that kind of missionary. (March 17, 2021)*[126]

The investment of the foreigners, while helpful in some regard, has been detrimental in other regards. There are growing frustrations from local believers of many American or other expatriates who 'come to bring the Gospel' and leave chaos, broken trust, and long-term issues for locals with police and neighbors. Their short-term desires to leave pamphlets and distribute materials are forced upon people. Often, this violates long-standing trust where local believers or long-term foreigners who have been cultivating trust and relationships with Muslim neighbors for long seasons. This trust is

[125] Pastor Ara, March 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Ara.
[126] Pastor Ara. Due to security issues for these pastors interviewed, their names have been given aliases for this thesis.

splintered with one or two visits and interactions with an overly excited Western foreigner who wants to 'bring the Gospel' immediately for the few days, weeks, or months when they are in Turkey.

The denominational tensions brought by various foreign workers who sought to teach, train, and promote their theology as the best way to plant churches in Turkey or disciple local believers, was part of the spark that prompted local leaders to formulate and articulate their expressions of indigenous Christian theology. It was out of the desire for unity between all believers that one of the most beautiful expressions of Christ's love uniting all brothers and sisters in unity developed in Turkey. Partly out of the theological interpretations and understandings of Scriptures that have arisen out of the people groups across the lands of Turkey, and partly in response to the persecution in a majority Muslim country where accusations of Christianity being a false faith if they cannot worship together, the Joint Commission of Churches in Turkey was formed. This Joint Commission of Churches was formed and compiled a catechism of sorts, *Christianity: Fundamental Teachings*. This book "expresses the shared beliefs of the Churches in Turkey. We approve its publication and recommend that it be widely read."[127] The 'we' that endorsed this writing of unifying foundational Christian teachings refers to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (Bartholomew I), the Armenian Patriarchal Surrogate in Turkey (Archbishop Karekin Bekciyan), the İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir Syriac Orthodox Diocesan Leader and Patriarchal Surrogate (Metropolitan Filuxinos Yusuf Çetin), the Chairman of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Turkey (Mons. Levon

[127] The Joint Commission of Churches in Turkey, ed., Christianity: Fundamental Teachings (Beyoğlu, İstanbul: Kitabı Mukaddes Şirketi, 2017), 3.

Archbishop Zekian), and the Chairman of the Association of Protestant Churches in Turkey (Pastor Ismail Kulakçıoğlu).

Local believers, gathering as One Body across ecumenical denominations to witness to the Muslim world around them that indeed there is One True God, and His People are One Body. They realize the truth of the call of Christ to his disciples - that they will know we are Christians by our love. This is what should mark Christians in the land. The truth that the Trinity is One God alone, rather than multiple gods as Islam claims it indicates, is true of Christianity due to the nature of the Trinity despite the divisions in the churches around the world. It is no small feat to gather and unanimously agree upon fundamental teachings across various churches. This developed partly out of the necessity to identify as One Body of Christ amidst a worldview that sees Christians as blasphemous and partly out of the core systematic theology which Turkey is developing as being rooted in love.[128] God is love. We are loved. We are called to love one another.

Ethnic Divisions Forgiving and Reconciling Through the Power of Jesus

Candidly and sorrowfully, Pastor Emre shares about the effects of religious and ethnic tensions and how mistrust arose from the remnant of minority and marginalized believers due to the painful past.

> *Well unfortunately because of a painful history, Armenians and Assyrian Christians, they didn't really trust Turks and so there was this gap- yes it was like we were brothers and sisters, but I mean it was like there was like this wall which I could understand why. You know, it was like those of us with a Muslim background, we [could] understand each other better and we were more helpful to each other. Of course, in time I realized what was going on you know and you know because of the Armenian genocide*

[128] The Joint Commission of Churches in Turkey, 79.

> *and the Turkish, you know policies in the past against Christians mainly. I mean people were assimilated, people were slaughtered, you know people were deported. It was a very painful past.*[129]

Yet, the power of Christ bringing healing to the people in Turkey through the believers across socially divided and previously hated lines is evident as Pastor Emre's tone of voice went from sorrow to warm in his reflections. "So, I totally understand, but some people in these Armenian and Assyrian congregations they were super helpful! They embraced us, encouraged us, they welcomed us! In time, actually the majority of those groups, they didn't really believe that Turks can really become Christians you know? They were suspicious of us."[130]

"Actually, it's kind of surprising because you know Turks don't also believe that Turks can become Christians."[131] Pastor Emre joyfully laughed while saying this as he knows the truth is hard for others to believe. Yet it is indeed possible and it is the truth he has committed his life to and the work of his life to share with others. "But in time, I think you know, God has really worked to remove these kind of barriers and unseen walls and so in time we established trust and we kind of grew out of that kind of distance situation. We [have] come a long way…we've come a long way…and I'm *so grateful* to God for that. Yes."[132] The lament of what had happened before, repentance, and restored hope in what God has been doing between the Armenian and Turkish believers was all reflected in his voice as he shared.

[129] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.
[130] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.
[131] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.
[132] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.

Melinda,[133] an Armenian-American long-time worker in Turkey, has an interesting perspective on the need for lament and repentance from both the Turkish and Armenian sides regarding the history between the two people groups, especially in regard to the Christian faith. Over the past three decades, Melinda and her husband have been living and working in Turkey for the sake of sharing the gospel with Turks. From their time living there, Melinda has grown a heart for the Turkish people and, upon reflecting over the Turkish-Armenian relationship of Christians between the two nations, says: "To be a Turk is to be a Muslim and to be Armenian is to be a Christian. Turkey needs to repent over what they did with the Armenians, and Armenians need to repent for what they did not do with the Gospel."[134] She went on in the Zoom interview (February 17th, 2021) to explain how she had to learn to forgive her own people, who claim to be the first Christian country in the world, and how Christianity is still the majority religion in Armenia to this day. She lamented how the Armenian Church had never seen it as part of their commissioning to share the good news of Jesus with the Turks or to anyone else for that matter. As to this day there has yet to be what she describes as 'a missionary movement' coming out of the Armenian Church to other people groups. Her sadness is over how the hoarding of the gospel, as if it were "our precious", was also a source that caused the unnecessary death of others, even eternal death, that needed to be acknowledged, confessed, and repented of as much as the active physical violence that caused death of millions from the Turks towards the Armenians. Both sadden her heart. Yet she has seen movement of the Holy Spirit in bringing new hope to both of these peoples through the power of the cross of forgiveness and reconciliation.

[133] Melinda's name has been changed due to security reasons.
[134] Melinda, February 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Melinda.

It is not just Pastor Emre and Melinda as individuals who share these thoughts. The powerful collective work and testimony of the Armenian-Turkish Peace Initiative (ATPI) demonstrates the deep rootedness of forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation that has been taking place between Armenian and Turkish believers at the turn of the 21st century[135]. The vision of ATPI is: "To see a movement of Armenians and Turks who have not only been reconciled with one another, but are working together toward the mutual betterment of their respective nations.[136]" Armenian and Turkish pastors and leaders have been gathering and speaking words of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, embrace. They have been seeking Kingdom partnership to move forward as reconciled brothers and sisters throughout ATPI gatherings and conferences. From a 2016 ATPI gathering in İstanbul, one attendee wrote:

> *This past week I witnessed Heaven on Earth. I witnessed grandchildren of the offenders come together with the grandchildren of their victims. They came together not because of politicians. They came together not because of the idea of humanity. They came together not because of some philosophy. They came together not because of societal and community pressures. They came together not because they were paid or had any kind of incentive. They came together not because a punitive demand from a human rights court of law. Both groups offered apologies with many tears, embraced each other, forgave each other, and forged friendship that will last for eternity! The Turkish leaders at first felt apprehensive, would the Armenian leaders accept them and their apology? The Armenians did not know what to think.*[137]

It was not just this attendee. Other attendees were recorded saying similar things from both the Armenian and Turkish side. Armenian pastors and leaders were recorded being in disbelief, shock, and amazement, never having imagined that they would have

[135] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative, "About ATPI: Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative," About ATPI, December 27, 2007, https://www.atpi.online/what-we-do.
[136] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative.
[137] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative, "Testimonies: ATPI," Testimonies, accessed April 22, 2021, https://www.atpi.online/testimonies.

witnessed something like this in their lifetimes.[138] Others expressed their own hatred towards the Turks, and generational violence they had learned and inherited from their own grandparents' killing of Turks. Lots of forgiveness and love poured out: "We forgive you, without condition, without demand, we forgive you."[139] Forgiveness rooted and drawn deep from Christ's love and forgiveness too: "We were forgiven so much, we forgive you."[140] This forgiveness was not just verbal but was actual steps towards reconciliation and restoration of relationship offered through the power of the cross and the Holy Spirit, made alive and manifesting through His people: "We love you, accept you as our brothers, and embrace you…How can we partner with you and work together in Turkey?"[141]

This forgiveness was only made publicly possible by the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Turkish believers manifesting through the humility and repentance publicly offered by Turkish pastors and leaders. Turkish leaders recounted the horrors of their grandparents' and great grandparents' generations: "What kind of people were we that would cause us to do such horror?"[142], "My grandfather explained that we would put our rifles on the ground, bayonets fixed towards the sky, and run the babies through in their bassinets until the river was flowing with their blood. (In Sivas)"[143], and the resolute articulation of what happened, "We committed a genocide. Please forgive us."[144]

The tension of being Turkish Christians was apparent. They have experienced and inherited the story of being both the oppressor and the oppressed. Generational lines

[138] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative.
[139] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative.
[140] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative.
[141] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative.
[142] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative.
[143] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative.
[144] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative.

of ethnic war between Turks and Armenians are rooted in multiple intersecting factors from religion to ethnicity to power of governance and authority. Turkish Christians are abused, belittled, oppressed, ostracized, labeled as apostates, thrown into jail, killed, and martyred for their faith by their own people, and yet they also hold the bloodlines of Turkish ancestors who did violence and the atrocity of bloodshed to Armenian Christians[145] generations before. "As Turks, we have faced some persecution, but nothing in comparison to what you as a people went through."[146] "Because of what our forefathers did, there is a curse upon our nation and our people."[147] "Thank you for accepting us, thank you for inviting us, thank you for forgiving us."[148]

While the power of forgiveness and reconciliation through the cross was happening in Turkey among believers whose ancestors have shared that land for hundreds of years, ATPI desires not just Turks and Armenians in Turkey to be reconciled but also for healing and restoration among the diaspora of Turks and Armenians globally. Eddy, an InterVarsity staff worker in Los Angeles, CA shared the impact the ATPI movement has been having in the USA among the Armenian and Turkish communities. Identifying as Armenian himself, with familial roots across the land of Turkey, he shared how he was brought to tears and inspired to be part of the ATPI gatherings that were happening in Los Angeles and in New Jersey. There was a group of around 100 members who were jointly traveling the world as a committee. Everywhere they went, they knelt down and washed the feet of Armenian believers and asked for forgiveness. In Fresno, CA, an older Armenian lady came forward weeping. Many thought she was weeping for the

[145] Along with Greek Christians and Jews.
[146] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative, "Testimonies: ATPI."
[147] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative.
[148] Armenian Turkish Peace Initiative.

people who had died in the genocide, but she shook her head and said that these were tears of joy of answered prayers: "I have prayed and prayed for Turkey! Never in my life have I seen or did I think I would see a Turkish Pastor, and here there are 6 or 7 of them standing before me!"[149] Sadly, the pandemic of COVID-19 brought a pause to the larger gatherings, but he is hopeful for the work that ATPI is doing and will continue to do in the years to come.

It is precisely these testimonies and the work of ATPI that are a gift to the Global Church to see a glimpse of the Kingdom of God here on earth: this work of bringing Christ-empowered healing through the cross, of being a witness to the world of the life-giving transformative systemic work of Christ to bring forth unity of people through love and forgiveness in Jesus' Name, of restoring and reconciling all people to Himself and to one another. It is through the Holy Spirit alone that such transformative rebuilding of broken, estranged and betrayed people can come together with love, peace, and hope as One Body- as brothers and sisters. It is truly a glimpse of the Kingdom bursting through here on earth in the midst of a weary world.

Persecution Leading to Proclamation and Revival

April 18, 2007 marked one of the bloodiest and most gruesome days of martyrdom in recent memory that drove the nation into deep conversation of consideration of the power of forgiveness and hope that Jesus Christ offers. Ziya Meral, a leading Christian Turkish researcher and theologian reflected on the event:

> *In 2007, the world was shaken by the brutal murders of two Turkish and one German Christian in Turkey. Five young men tied the Christians- Necati, Ugur, and Tilman- to chairs and tortured them for hours before*

[149] Melinda, February 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Melinda.

> *slitting their throats. According to their own statements, the accused murderers (who were caught by the police at the scene of the crime) were trying to "get information" about the "secret aims and plans" of Christians to "destroy Turkey by converting Muslims." These murders were only the latest in a growing number of attacks on non-Muslims in Turkey. The Turkish state offered dubious apologies and feeble efforts to stem this rising tide of violence. Public voices repeated that "they were sorry" and that "they do not condone violence." However, the public voices also said, "But missionaries are not innocent." To each expression of condolence was attached a "but" that granted some form of legitimacy to the violence against non-Muslims. Although proselytizing is a violation of neither Turkish nor international human rights law, the Turkish state, to this day, sees the activities of non-Muslims as a security threat. Schoolchildren read about the 'vicious historical agendas" of "missionaries" in their textbooks, which causes a wide-ranging negative attitude toward non-Muslims. For the fewer than 100,000 Christians left in the country of more than seventy million people, such attitudes elicit serious worries for their lives and the future of their dwindling communities.*[150]

The blood of two Turkish believers and a German believer planted seeds of hope for a nation that does not readily accept nor extend forgiveness, especially for horrendous crimes, where bodies were so mutilated and disembodied they were beyond recognition. It was not just their death that sparked curiosity but also the living hope, faith, love and forgiveness proclaimed by their surviving widows, children, and the rest of the local believers in their communities that ignited intrigue into the "Jesus as Lord" proclamation rather than solely as a holy prophet as He is more commonly known. A decade later, the Protestant Church has seen 150-200 % exponential growth since their death and martyrdom with the addition of 3,000 believers converting from Islam.

> *Necati Aydın, Uğur Yüksel, and Tilmann Geske went to their office to study the Bible with a group of five young men, some of whom they had known for several months. These young men, none of whom were older than twenty years, threatened the Christians, tied them up, and tortured them. When another local Christian became suspicious, he called the police. As the police were arriving, the young men took the lives of the three Christians. The youth were caught red-*

[150] Kelly James Clark, ed., Abraham's Children: Liberty and Tolerance in an Age of Religious Conflict (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2012), 167.

> *handed, arrested, and tried for their crimes, and the plot was later revealed to be part of a larger conspiracy in which powerful people had agreed to support the young men's families if they would commit this crime. In the days following, the press spoke to one of the widows, and she declared her forgiveness for the murderers. In Turkish culture, however, forgiveness is not a common trait, and it was unheard of that someone could forgive such an act of evil. So the story spread, and people across Turkey were talking about it in their homes, tea houses, and places of business.*[151]

While Malatya is one of the most well-known accounts, there have been ongoing waves of persecution of Christians even post-Ottoman Empire since the independence of Turkey in 1925. Melinda both recounts and writes in a paper that many were experiencing waves of arrests from the 60s, more in the 80s, and some up till now.[152] The willingness to be persecuted and to not fear the government authorities, was one of the things in which long-term workers were able to join together with local believers when choosing to embrace Turkey as their home.

> *This first decade of [Western] Christian work in modern Turkey was characterized by a great deal of police harassment and deportations and very few Muslim converts… The workers had to deal with deception, misdeed and mistrust, particularly after the police raid. These were common themes in the tiny Turkish fellowships of the 1970's. While the Christians were sowing seeds of the gospel, the enemy was sowing seeds of fear, watered by frequent police harassment and deportations… In 1987, a group of workers visited Çetin Özek, the lawyer who had a reputation for defending Jehovah Witnesses in their many court cases. His advice was for church members to get arrested many times, so that they could establish their Constitutional rights to freedom of religion. His advice was taken up in 1988 when over 50 national and foreign believers were arrested as part of a national shakedown and held for varying times. In general, the nationals defended their faith, and all the court cases resulted in acquittals. This furnished a file full of important precedents. It was also an important step forward in the battle against fear.*[153]

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[151] Ed Alden, "The Malatya Murders and Ten Years of Forgiveness," April 18, 2017, https://www.imb.org/2017/04/18/the-malatya-murders-and-ten-years-of-forgiveness/.
[152] Melinda, "Striving Together for the Faith of the Gospel: A United Approach to Mission in Turkey 1961-1996" (Istanbul, 1996), 8–9; Interview with Melinda.
[153] Pam Wilson, "Striving Together for the Faith of the Gospel: A United Approach to Mission in Turkey 1961-1996," 10–12, 16.

Pastor Emre confirms her sharing with similar stories of arrests in the 70s being part of the foundation of spreading the message of Jesus across Turkey:

> *Well because you know it was just a handful Christians, I mean you can imagine the experience for us- we didn't have like an Orthodox tradition or Catholic tradition we just came to know Jesus and that's it, you know. Yeah so it was like we were like starting up from the scratch. I was talking to… I don't want to give names but he was a representative of a big evangelistic organization and I was talking to him once and he mentioned that his wife had come to Turkey in the 70s and she was like giving out brochures or something. And she was at that time picked up and jailed for a while. And she was, and he remember his wife saying that back in the 70s, there were only maybe 40 Turkish Christians in all of Turkey. (February 23, 2021)*[154]

More recently, on November 19, 2019, a Korean Christian in southeastern Turkey was targeted and allegedly murdered for his mobile phone. However, all investigations and authorities have shown that it was not a random attack, but rather a calculated and planned executed attack on him most likely from a group based on multiple stab wounds from different directions and the deduction that a martially trained grown adult would not easily be brought down by a solo young teenager as the defendant tries to tell.[155]

Even as Pastor Emre looks ahead to the future, he is hopeful for the expansion and growth of the Turkish church in the coming years, particularly because of this pattern he has seen in the past. As the governing authorities have been steadily rejecting and deporting many foreigners, short-term and long-term workers, spontaneously without cause, local leaders see it as persecution and spiritual warfare cracking down on the spread of the Gospel and therefore are hopeful of what the Spirit of God is doing and preparing to do in these coming years. He is also hopeful for the rise of more Turkish

[154] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.
[155] Barbara G. Baker, "Korean Murdered in Southeast Turkey 'for Mobile Phone,'" World Watch Monitor, November 29, 2019, https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/11/korean-murdered-in-southeast-turkey-for-mobile-phone/.

believers into spaces of leadership as there is now a vacuum of leaders. This gives him joy as he anticipates the ways in which Turkish believers will see their own gifting and grow deeper as disciples who make disciples seeing themselves now as the elders in the land.

> *I believe that there are two critical things. [Firstly] church planting. And, you know, we have over 120 churches in Turkey right now, I believe. But all of these churches are small churches, you know, 10 people, 15 people, 20 people, you know, and a church of 50, or 60 would be a great church, because it's our mega church. And it's a good thing! Let it happen that way. It's because people want to when they come to churches, they want to be known, they want to meet people, they want to be recognized, and they want to continue that sense of family environment. So, church planting. There are so many places, as I told you…where I live right now, there weren't churches, except the one in the city or county. But now there are in all the major counties there are churches. And we want to see that happen, you know, just a church. And when we are planting churches, the most critical thing is the leader. There was an area for example, we visited so many times out in the east, you know, and we couldn't plant a church there even though people converted and became Christians, because there wasn't, there wasn't a pastor, a local pastor, who would be there… Actually, I wanted to be there. I was praying for that. But people there, they said that, no, you're not able, this is a Kurdish area. They said that "you're Turkish, you can come and go. But if you live here, you're not safe. It's not safe for you." So then raising up leaders and planting churches, I would say, is the way to go… From now on instead of just pastoring a church, you know, I just raise up other pastors. And I think that it's very crucial, you know, raising up leaders and pastors and planting churches with them. So, I think that these are two crucial things for the long-run. (February 23, 2021)*[156]

> *We still need a lot of help. Turkey is mostly unevangelized and people are still lost you know lost at large and you know they we still need a little. The Turkish churches are still very fragile… it's still very immature and so we need a lot of help at this time. And especially this Coronavirus time exposed it. Many foreigners left [were recently deported], it exposed that you know foreigners left at the same time when the Coronavirus struck us so it was like at least these brothers and sisters they had ministries and churches helping us so now we have to do what they were doing as well and in a pandemic time which is very difficult. It's a time when people lose*

[156] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.

their jobs and they need help you know, but I think that for the long run- I hope that it will just strengthen the Turkish church. (February 23, 2021)[157]

Pastor Emre speaks with deep joy, gentleness, hope, and conviction when describing the nature of the movement of God in the lives of locals. Since his conversion almost 40 years ago, he has grown in discipleship to deepen his faith, later becoming and rising up as a respected, revered, and leading pastor in one of the major cities before relocating himself to another area of the country to raise up future pastors and elders. He sees his role as someone akin to Barnabas, pouring into the next generation of Turkish leaders. Sharing about an average Turkish believer's experience coming to faith in Jesus out of a Muslim-background, he says:

Yeah, it can be a challenge because there are so many lies and deception, and denial about the Bible and about the New Testament, about who Jesus Christ is and what he did, and so a person coming to know Jesus has to go through a lot of stuff. For example, I got baptized and then for one year, I was still going on like, 'What is this you know, the Quran says this but the New Testament says this- what's going on?' I was going in between, left and right, so it took me some time to get convinced and assured. But most importantly, I think that there was not a strong Turkish leadership that I could look up to- at that time. So, you know, that's what I want to be to other Turkish people, I mean, new believers. To give you an example, a few years ago, in our Kadıköy church, someone became a Christian and he was happy! He was like, just experiencing God's love and, you know, just realizing that he has been forgiven and accepted and everything. And it's beautiful to see him, but then he found a job in İstanbul and then he was like telling everybody, you know, about his faith. And then they said, 'Either you're going to, you know, say Salavat, you know, it's the prayer to accept Mohamed, or you will be…we don't want to see you here.' So one week passed, and he said, of course, I cannot say no. So we lost his job. And then we prayed and prayed every day so that he could find a job. And he found another job. And he was again, sharing the gospel with everybody. And unfortunately, the same thing happened and he lost his job again. So one day, he came to me crying, saying, like, 'Is it always going to be like this?' It's a very difficult question. You know, for a pastor. It's not always going to be so difficult, you know, but YES- it's going to be, you know, following Christ. It's interesting that Jesus never really watered

[157] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.

> *down his call, you know, he almost sounds in places like, he doesn't want people almost like don't fall, you know, take up your cross daily and follow me if you don't, you're not worthy of me. I mean, it's like a serious challenge. No. So it's like, so it's so yes, we are, we know what Jesus means. And, and so. So it's a challenge to grow up as a disciple. It's a challenge, you know, and for believers, either, even if their families don't disown them, they still have to live with them, you know, and it's another challenge, because, you know, there's always so much negativity, you're insulted daily, you know, they look down on you. You're trying to share the gospel, but they're not letting you do that. And so it's a, it's a battle, you know. But the Turkish church is emerging. And I think that, you know, it's become unstoppable now, you know, because we have Turkish evangelists. Now, we have Turkish teachers, preachers, now, and Turkish churches now. And so I think it's, you know, it's, it's become unstoppable, you know, and I think that it's growing, so I praise God for it. (February 23, 2021)*[158]

Today it is estimated by Pastor Ara that there are 100,000 Christians all together: 40,000-45,000 Armenian Orthodox, 10,000 Syrian Orthodox, 3,000 Greek Orthodox, 4,000 Catholics, and the rest Protestants either part of the Turkish Protestant Church or secret converts who have chosen to remain apart from attending a local church.[159]

Turkish Culture Uniquely Embodying the Gospel to Extend His Kingdom: Hospitality, Presence, and Faithfulness

A few ways which Turks embody the Gospel love and life of Jesus is through hospitality, the ministry of presence, and remembering rites of passage such as anniversaries of deaths, weddings, and birthdays. Melinda has experienced these things first-hand through friendship with her Turkish believing friends, such as friends remembering that a year had passed since the passing of a beloved friend of hers, and bringing her a flower in remembrance. Or the example of another friend making this remembrance certain in a conversation, recalling when a significant event had taken place in Melinda's life, as she specifically noted, "It was the year your mom died," and gave

[158] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.
[159] Pastor Ara, March 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Ara.

the exact year to date. Event marking things that seem inconsequential to others are marked and remembered with significance and care like the remembrance stones God commands of His Israelite children. Symbols that mark time and significant events resonate deeply within the Turkish culture and make the sacrament of communion one of the most joyful and fully embodied understandings of the gift of Christ within the church in Turkey. This is a symbolic action that draws hearts and minds back to the greatest extravagant and humanly insane concept of radical love poured out, forgiveness, poured out, and reconciliation brought through Jesus' broken and murdered body upon the cross - for us. Because of us.

Hospitality is a Turkish trait that almost any visitor returning from Turkey will talk about. The Turkish themselves speak of it as well. This is an echo of the surrounding region which had many deep roots of the Early Church. One brother in Christ who currently lives and works in Turkey, but is originally from a neighboring country's people group comments about hospitality and Turkish culture:

> *Do we really know which informed which? Was it the Early Church's widespread presence in this region that has shaped the Turkish culture, and even more so Middle Eastern cultures to be so hospitable? Or were the people in this region already so hospitable, when they heard the teachings of Jesus it resonated deeply with them and made sense to live out what Jesus was saying to give and to share with neighbor and family? I think it might be the former, as we know human hearts are too often selfish, not thinking of others first. (April 16, 2019)*[160]

From receiving gifts from visitors upon their arrival as grateful anticipation of their hosting, to unlimited refills of Turkish tea during any sit-down conversation, to the knowledge that if there is a need in the community, the family will care for them and neighbors too, hospitality is shown. The collective, communal, and inclusiveness of

[160] Interview with Brother Haik, April 16, 2019.

Turkish culture means that everyone knows each other's business and everyone makes it their business to ensure one another are cared for well, as best as one can by their own means.

What sets the Turkish Church apart from local Turks actions of hospitality is the hospitality that is offered to those of a different faith - the hospitality that is offered to those of a different ethnicity or nationality in daily life beyond the tourist hubs. This hospitality is offered to the Body of Christ, as if it were indeed family themselves, even if they do not live next door nor share familial blood. This extravagant offering of hospitality is a witness to the people of Turkey, and a testimony of the presence of the Holy Spirit who is alive and shaping the mindset of believers. This demonstrates not just to Turkey, but to others across the world what hospitality in the Kingdom of God is to look like. It is not by coincidence that Turkey currently hosts the most number of refugees in the world, with over 3.6 million refugees, followed by Colombia with 1.8 million, Pakistan and Uganda with 1.4 million each.[161] It would be wise for this hospitality, which is anchored in the forgiveness and reconciliation of Christ, to be made manifest in the Global Church as an offering of hope and a beacon of the Kingdom of God that would illuminate the Body of Christ and offer hope beyond human imagination to a divided and vengeful world. When the Old Testament speaks of God's care for the refugee,[162] Turkish believers can be a witness here on earth as a glimpse of God's heart for the foreigner and refugee in a way the Global Church can learn from. Ziya Meral shares similar sentiments as the Joint Commission- that the core of God's heart for his

[161] UNHCR, "UNHCR Global Trends 2019 Report," accessed April 5, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/.
[162] Leviticus 23:22, Leviticus 25:35, Numbers 35:15, Deuteronomy 16:14; 26:11, Deuteronomy 14:28-29

people and call of believers is rooted in love for all people, not just those who are 'like us'.

> *According to Jesus, these two commandments [Matt.22:37-40] are the cornerstone of all that we believe and have to live by. Clearly, for him, the love of God and personal dedication to follow his precepts is inseparable from the love of one's neighbor. In fact, one cannot claim to love God* without *loving his or her neighbor. The vast majority of the teachings of Christ focus on loving and restoring the dignity of those whom the religious shun. In eating with adulterers and tax collectors and in praising the goodness found in despised religious groups such as the Sadducees, Christ offered an example for his followers to see others as being equally as worthy of the love and blessings of God. Christ identifies himself with whoever is unjustly excluded, mistreated, and left to suffer- not simply with those who are Christian. He goes further when he says that if any good thing is done for those who are suffering or in jail, it is as if it is done for him; and those who do not run to help the suffering are failing to run to help Christ [Matt. 25:31-46].*[163]

Turkish believers are also adept through their Turkish heritage in practicing the ministry of presence. It is part of the relational culture of Turkey to be completely present with someone in the moment you are with them and continually present for however long that moment lasts.[164] Moments can last minutes or hours. Walking with someone through the processing seasons of life, such as major life decisions, trauma, or grief, can last for months or years. Like the compassion of God, slow to anger and abounding in love, walking faithfully, persevering, always protecting, always trusting, always hoping,[165] like the love Christ Jesus teaches us how to walk in love with others, Turkish believers embody this deep standing, long-lasting love. Perhaps it is due to the diffuse nature of Turkish relationships, in comparison to the Western specific nature of relationships, that gives an agency to a Christ-like hope of fullness of restoration and the

[163] Ziya Meral, How Violence Shapes Religion: Belief and Conflict in the Middle East and Africa, First [edition] (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 165.
[164] Melinda, February 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Melinda. This is also a truth known first-hand as researcher and author who shares this Turkish cultural heritage.
[165] 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

energy for life-long investment to those who have shared holistically, becoming part of the inner private life of friendship together. The tenacity of believers in Turkey to hope beyond hope, persevere with forgiveness, seeking in human ways to try to emulate the divine pouring out of love, albeit in humanly limitations, yet with a hope and tenacity beyond what most others might ever hope or imagine or even dream possible here and now. Perhaps it is the combination of the diffuse with the relational worldview mindset that prioritizes in this way in contrast to the task and specific nature of other cultural worldviews that draws such a hope out of the believers in Turkey. Or perhaps it's part of their unique reflection of the Kingdom that shimmers with another worldly radiance of hope this side of heaven.

The power of forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ Jesus through the cross for the unification of all people as One Body of Christ is just one example of contextualization of the Kingdom of God here on earth that is seen through the lives of believers in Turkey. Leaving worldly strife, prejudices, and hatred behind at the foot of the cross, and choosing to embrace the long-lasting compassion of love to remain present in moments with others even if it takes prolonged seasons and years is perhaps a glimpse of perseverance rooted in hope. Perhaps allowing the richness of the power of Christ to bring to fruition Kingdom unity of God's people through peace, love, joy, faithfulness, gentleness, goodness, patience, and self-control by the indwelling of the Spirit offers a glimpse to the world of the truth that Christ-centered reconciliation and forgiveness is possible here on earth as it is in heaven. Their lives are an example of not bringing brokenness and divisions into the Body of Christ, of humanity and equal love of God for all people, none to be embraced more readily over another, expressed through their

remorse for history of their people and the land. Prayers of "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!" are the cries of their hearts and embodied prayers of their lives.

The spiritual awareness of Turkish believers comes from their experience growing up in Islam before their conversions or being surrounded by a very superstitious and openly spirit-filled world because of living in a majority Muslim nation. The infamous *mavi bonjuk,* 'blue evil eye,' has become a common design on almost everything crafted in the nation. Yet, it is a symbol of Islamic fear of evil spirits which was created to catch any evil spirits floating around in the air.

The victory of Christ Jesus over sin, death, and the devil is one of the greatest hopes offered to Muslim background believers because they both grow up in the fear of demonic warfare and many have experienced the heaviness of oppression from such. The Muslim background believer has an understanding and awareness of the freedom, hope, and new life here and now that Christ Jesus offers to them and their communities. There is no turning back, despite persecution, when someone exchanges persecution and torment from demonic spirits for the persecution by fellow men. The promise of the Holy Spirit will empower those here on earth and give one eternal life in death. The long tradition of Christianity in Turkey reminds Turks to acknowledge the need for Scripture in order to keep them grounded. Their backgrounds anchor them in the reality that faith that is apart from the Holy Spirit is watered down from the gift of power and resurrected life offered by God to his children.

> *I think we need the power of the Holy Spirit, but we need to be grounded in the scriptures as well. So I just really, really like that balance. ...Let me be honest with you, over the years, I've seen hundreds of people come to Christ and I can safely say that, in our church, at least, I can safely say*

> *that almost half, you know, were either like healed, or we pray for them and they are healed, or they're touched, or they're freed from demons. Demons is a big thing in Turkey. And so many people come to churches, knowing how many demons they have. I mean so many incredible cases. And honestly when I first was encountering these, I didn't know what to do, because no one taught me. You know, women being raped by demons and, you know, so much. It's our culture, you know, because it's mostly Muslim but before then they were 'shamans'. So they weren't Christians in history. So it was never broken in that regard. So I mean, some people are heavily, heavily demonized, and demon possessed or whichever term you prefer. So they need deliverance. And so, it's like, Yes, I, we need to minister to people, the way Christ ministered to them, we need to be bold about praying for them, and we need to serve them, and love them, be humble, and share the gospel in words as well as the power of the Holy Spirit with them, you know, just as Paul was sharing the gospel. (February 23, 2021)*[166]

While the history of Christianity in Turkey is long, most members of the Global Church outside of MENA are not aware of the work of the Spirit of God through His people in Turkey beyond the letters of Paul to Asia Minor or stories recorded in Acts. In contrast to other well-known theological entities, the perseverance to remain faithful, enduring suffering, repenting for collective sin and seeking forgiveness through reconciliation, and choosing to be known for love and unity rooted in Christ across denominational or ecumenical lines, to be known for hospitality, presence, faithfulness, are the marks of the Turkish Church. This is a part of the Kingdom of God reflected through His people in Turkey. These marks are a gift to see and learn from, just as Turkey partakes in learning from other nations' pursuit of Christ in their own journey of faith.

The Turkish Church has much to offer the Global Church, and in turn, also much to learn. While there is growing unity among believers, there are also ways that the cultural worldview of those living in Turkey sets the lens through which scripture is read

[166] February 23, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Emre.

and Christianity is understood and lived out. One of these areas, where it would benefit the Turkish church to be in dialogue and cross-cultural partnership with many others across the Global Church is related to the view of women in the church. Particularly the view of women in ministry from a patriarchal foundational view and understanding of the world. Or the reality, that the majority of Christian materials are direct translations of Euro-American works, rather than new writings offered from local theologians. Ziya Meral is one of the few who has written from a Turkish context himself extensively, however even his voice is sometimes not heard as publications of his have been stopped due to pressure from the government.

Chapter 4

Contributions from the Ugandan Church

> *In an effort to contribute to African ecclesiological scholarship, I offer a conceptual ecclesiology drawn from Hebrews in which the church is understood as a community approaching God, in Christ, in his heavenly dwelling (the heavenly Mount Zion) to offer him, through the same Christ, prayers and immaterial sacrifices, and to live in obedience to him en route to partaking in the coming fullness of his presence and kingdom. This fullness will result in the realization of God's purposes for creating the world.*[167]
>
> — ***Peter Nyende****, (Ugandan Anglican Priest & University Professor)*

Introducing Uganda

Uganda is 'the pearl of Africa.'[168] It is renowned for its environmental beauty, loving people, and generosity towards refugees fleeing for safety from nearby war-torn nations, among other things. The Ugandan Church is very vibrant and expansive across the nation with a range of depth of believers. Some of the strongest commission minded believers reflect that Christianity is 'so wide but so shallow.'[169] It has grown expansively, with close to 82% of the entire population recorded as Christian on the 2014 census.[170] However, Uganda is seen by the Western world, particularly by the USA, as one of the primary nations to send missionaries to, especially for short-term trips. The Ugandan people have a welcoming disposition and deep value of hospitality and keep

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[167] Peter Nyende, "The Church as an Assembly on Mount Zion: An Ecclesiology from Hebrews for African Christianity," in Majority World Theology: Christian Doctrine in Global Context (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2020), 565.
[168] Official country slogan of Uganda. Differing opinions on who first used the term over 100 years ago. Consistently used nationally throughout the country today without quotation.
[169] Gilian Edube, April 27, 2021 Zoom Interview with Gilian; James Oyet, May 14, 2021 Video Call Interview with James Oyet, Video Call, May 14, 2021.
[170] "Uganda 2019 International Religious Freedom Report," International Religious Freedom Report (United States Department of State: Office of International Religious Freedom, 2019), https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/UGANDA-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf.

their doors open to receive visitors with a warm heart and celebratory greetings. One can also see the emergence of quiet courage and humble strength of Ugandans in the visionary rise of African Independent Churches across the nation. John D.K. Ekem, describes these churches as "a 'protest movement' against the 'over-Westernization' of European mission-founded churches in Africa, considering that the latter could hardly satisfy the deep-seated needs of their African audiences."[171]

The Ugandan church is relatively young compared to other nations with a deep history of Christianity. Between the communal culture of Ugandan people groups, along with an astute awareness of supernatural realities, and the rising invasion of their lands by both the Arab slave trade, as well as the British colonialists, the Ugandan hearts and communities were made fertile soil to receive the seed of the Kingdom of God. There was an earnest desire to seek hope amidst oppression from both the British colonialists and Arab slave traders, as well as a keen awareness of the reality of a supernatural world's existence that interplays with the natural world. Both these things made the hope of Jesus Christ's victory over sin, evil, principalities, and oppression to set the captives free spiritually and holistically incredible news of hope, new life, and living water of joy amidst their daily realities.

In particular, the beginnings of Christian faith in Uganda, is from the seeds of young Ugandan martyrs. Their hope and new life in Jesus Christ gave them courage amidst injustice inflicted upon them by ruling powers and instilled a spirit of perseverance, joy, and hope amidst suffering which is still seen in the lives of believers across Uganda today.

[171] Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and Khiok-Khng Yeo, eds., Majority World Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), p.633.

The Ugandan martyrs were killed within the first decade of recorded gospel proclamation in the land of Uganda. Ugandans refer to King Mutessa, the Bugandan Kabaka (king) during the late 19th century, as the first one to invite Christians to come to his kingdom to share their faith with them.[172] It is said that he asked one of the British explorers to write to the Anglican Church Missionary Society (ACMS) to request a missionary to come to the land and teach their faith.[173] While some speculate about the intention behind the letter, whether a political maneuver to bring allies to support the Bugandans fight against the Arabs invasion or a pure desire for hearing and learning the Christian faith, ACMS sent missionaries who arrived in 1877-1878 in response. Many quickly learned and received the Gospel, to the dismay of the Kabaka, as he was denied baptism upon his refusal to give up polygamy and slavery in his court. June 3rd, 1886 marks the day that 31 of the young pages were executed at Namugongo "by burning- the most respectful way"[174] along with one of their mentors, Charles Lwanga, who had continued to baptize even a few of them earlier that day.

What is most remarkable about this day, was that all the boys went to the stakes rejoicing, singing praises of the glories that were to come, praying for Mwanga's court and those who were executing them. Even young Mbaga Tuzinde, who was the son of the chief executioner, did not renounce his faith much to his father's despair. While there had been a struggle and discrimination already between Catholics and Protestants, on this day, June 3rd 1886, these young Catholics and Protestants alike were united through the

[172] Buganda is one of the many kingdoms that is now part of the Ugandan nation. It is still in operation today within the nation state of Uganda, and is located in central Uganda, where Kampala the capital city is now located. It's strength as a kingdom was realized by colonialists and thus became one of the trusted people groups colonialists invested in to lead or oppress other tribal states under colonial rule. Nuwamanya Mategyero Daniel, Interview with Nuwamanya Mategyero Daniel, Zoom, June 23, 2021.
[173] John F. Faupel, African Holocaust: The Story of the Uganda Martyrs, 10.
[174] William B. Anderson, The Church in East Africa, 1840-1974., 29.

cross of Christ, which they proclaimed, to their death and "all died in the Christian hope."[175]

> *These young men are commemorated as the first Ugandan martyrs- 22 of them being canonized later on by the Catholic Church. Their zeal, fervor, and joy through which they testified of Christ and refused the ways of the Kabaka that were not of God, became an iconic symbol and inspiration for Buganda. Rather than ridding his kingdom from the intoxicating doctrine of Christianity through this intense persecution, the act of Mwanga had the reverse effect: many Christians fled from the area and scattered across all of the Ugandan kingdoms, thus more widely spreading Christianity throughout the lands.*[176]

Uganda is comprised of over 56 tribes across 75 districts, joined together as one nation which fought for its national freedom from the United Kingdom and received global recognition of independence on October 9, 1962.[177] Only five tribes were recognized in the Ugandan Constitution amended in 1995, but over time, the others too were assimilated and captured into different bylaws.[178] Ugandans share much in common with their neighbors, as numerous tribes were split by European colonialists' land grabbing rather than by any local ethnic division. This European mapping of African territories separated centuries of tribal lands of the Luo people (including Acholi, Langi, and Alur), Sebei, Bakiga, Kakwa, Lugbara, Madi, Karamojong and Iteso who all reside in Uganda as well as surrounding neighboring lands of Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and the DRC.[179] In light of this reality, when talking about the contributions of the Ugandan Church to the Global Church's theology, one must recognize the equal importance of listening to the voices of the East African theologians,

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[175] William B. Anderson, 32.
[176] Petek Altuğ, "The Story of Christianity in Uganda," February 28, 2014, 5.
[177] Achieve Global Safaris Limited, "Tribes in Uganda," Company Page, Tribes in Uganda, 2021, https://www.ugandasafaristours.com/blog/tribes-in-uganda.html.
[178] "Uganda 1995 (Rev. 2017)," 2017, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Uganda_2017?lang=en.
[179] "Uganda- Ethnic Groups," (2019), https://www.africa.upenn.edu/NEH/u-ethn.html.

who culturally are as similar to each other, despite the last 50 years of national state lines. Politically speaking, East Africa has officially formed the East African Community (EAC) and is working towards making it a federated sovereign state consisting of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, and South Sudan.[180] As scholars of the Global Church, the depth and breadth of East African pastors and theologians as it pertains to the patterns seen across the region should be acknowledged and approached with humble curiosity, specifically in regard to Uganda.

The contributions of Christian thought and theology rising out of Uganda are endless. For this thesis, the scope will focus on the integral voice of women to the theological growth and orthopraxy of Christianity in Uganda, the Acholi example of resilience, courage, forgiveness, and hope in following God amidst traumatic suffering, indigenous missional movements, and eschatological theology that cultivates ecological conservation. These areas are glimpses of the Kingdom shining through the Ugandan context and culture to radiate more of God's Kingdom witness to the world, something which needs to be heard and seen by the Global Church and non-believers alike.

The Theological Voices of East African Women

One of the beautiful visible pieces of Ugandan culture shaping the growth and trajectory of Christianity in Uganda and throughout East Africa, is the gift of many matriarchically run households. While men are traditionally the heads of households and breadwinners, there are many families, especially in under-resourced communities where women work hard to ensure food is on the table, the house management is in order, and

[180] David Himbara, "East African Community Integration: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," The African Report, August 26, 2020, https://www.theafricareport.com/39264/east-african-community-integration-one-step-forward-two-steps-back/.

children are growing up to be mature and educated citizens of society. This occurs sometimes solely with women alone, and sometimes alongside their husbands. The honoring and leadership of women in the community has also opened doors for female Christian theologians and Christian thought leaders to arise in Uganda and East Africa. Some theologians include Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, a sister of St. Francis, Stephanie Lowery, and Gilian Edube, among others.

Sister Anne is renowned for her dedication to tirelessly advocate for the poor and marginalized, faith, and justice.[181] As a professor of Systematic Theology, expressed throughout her teachings and prolific writings, she speaks up prophetically to the Global Church's growth edge from her Catholic East African perspective. She has served as a General Superior of the Religious Institute of Little Sisters of St. Francis from 1992 to 1998 and again from 2010 to 2016 and as Professor of Systematic Theology and Moral Theology in the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, as well as several years as a Dean of students.[182] "We need a theology that maintains and promotes justice rather than charity, equality rather than paternalism, solidarity rather than isolation, communion and restitution rather than giving of loans. We need a theology that affirms differences in various world cultures and learns from them new ways of approaching God and the sacred."[183]

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[181] Emily Reimer-Barry, "In Gratitude for the Life and Witness of Sister Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, LSOSF," Catholic Moral Theology (blog), February 27, 2018, https://catholicmoraltheology.com/in-gratitude-for-the-life-and-witness-of-sister-anne-nasimiyu-wasike-lsosf/.
[182] Emily Reimer-Barry, "In Gratitude for the Life and Witness of Sister Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, LSOSF," Catholic Moral Theology, February 27, 2018, https://catholicmoraltheology.com/in-gratitude-for-the-life-and-witness-of-sister-anne-nasimiyu-wasike-lsosf/.
[183] Emily Reimer-Barry.

She has spent her life writing about the need for theology to be articulated from a female perspective, as most of theology from the beginning of Christianity has been written from the male perspective.

> *The theology on the person of Jesus tended to be much more philosophical and abstract than that of the existential Jesus of the Gospels who calls people as individuals and as a community to authentic human existence. Although Christian women of every century have reflected on the person of Jesus and on their relationship to him, much of their Christology remains unwritten.*[184]

From interviews with various women, Sister Anne summarizes perfectly the Christological development found through East African sisters. Several findings of factors emerge: "First of all, their Christian concepts of Jesus which they have learned from their catechism; second, their holistic view of life, where Jesus affects their whole life; third, their belief in the reality of witches and evil powers from which Jesus has to save them; and finally, their courage to be, to suffer, and to endure hardships with the hope that soon all this will be over and everything will be restored to wholeness in Jesus Christ."[185]

Not only is there emerging theology coming out of Uganda, similarly to Kenya, both Ugandan and Kenyan men and women are being trained in the local Bible Schools and seminaries. The Christology developing out of East Africa, is one that offers hope to the majority of women and children there. It is no wonder that most of the Ugandan churches are filled with women and children. When speaking of God, Sister Anne writes:

> *This God, the Christ, is the one who takes on the conditions of the African woman- the conditions of weakness, misery, injustice, and oppression. In his own lifetime, Jesus rejected the androcentric culture of the Jewish people. His mission was countercultural. He gave special attention to the*

[184] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience," in Faces of Jesus in Africa (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 70.
[185] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, 73.

> *downtrodden and the marginalized of the society- the prostitutes, beggars, sinners, tax collectors, and ritually unclean. And most of these people were women. Jesus Christ came to heal a broken humanity. He empowered and enabled the downtrodden of society to realize their dignity and worth as persons. He continues to empower and enable the African woman today so that she passes from unauthentic to authentic human existence, and so that she discovers her true identity of being made in the image and likeness of God.*[186]

Gilian Edube is a Kenyan born PhD Educational Studies candidate at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS) currently in the USA. She married a Ugandan man and together with their family have served in Uganda for over 13 years. They met each other on a cross-cultural missions training program in Norway, in preparation for serving with FOCUS Uganda, a collegiate campus ministry and branch of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). She served as a campus minister, team leader, and co-director of countless cross-cultural summer internship programs with American university students. As a current PhD candidate and ministry leader in EAC, her views on what theology growth from a Ugandan perspective, or another East African perspective, point to the need for indigenous reflection articulated in the Global conversation of theological development. Currently, she laments how most of the theology taught in Uganda, or elsewhere on the continent of Africa, "is not offered in context."[187] Her dream and hope for the future of Ugandan theology is for local theologians to arise, to help Ugandan people understand God and faith from their cultural context and perspective, not from a translated version through a Western teacher. During a Zoom interview conducted on April 27, 2021 she shared:

> *You have a partnership between a US school and one in Uganda, or one in Africa. But because we are in a partnership, the US dictates how that happens. The courses are done the way they're supposed to be done in the*

[186] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, 77.
[187] Gilian Edube, April 27, 2021 Zoom Interview with Gilian.

> *US. And what happens is that [Ugandan] people are not [finding] meaning of the things that they are learning. And so you have very interesting theology… And many partnerships that we are starting to see from the West with the African theological schools, but my hope is that the curriculum needs to look like [our own] or the professors come from this side. And that's it, like if you're taught [theology], unless we develop our professors who can teach and understand our context, it continues to be foreign. And so they hope that there can be a rise of more theology teachers, and teachers that are doing teaching in missions, schools and theology schools, that are African!*[188]

As Sister Anne and Gilian exemplify, there is a rising voice of Christology and Christian leadership development arising from East African Women for this younger generation, both for their own beloved communities but also as an arm at work contributing to the Kingdom formation of the Global Church through these female image bearers leading the way in East Africa. Their voices and perspectives help guide younger believers towards the Truth of Christ in their own cultural context while also speaking prophetically to the Global Church. Their example as educated believers is not the only place where the Holy Spirit is at work in Uganda. The Holy Spirit is moving through both men and women across the nation, from multiple tribal backgrounds or socio-economic statuses.

Acholi Example of Resilience, Courage, Forgiveness, and Hope in Following God

> *.Apora bot oneko apwoyo poro jami oturu yib apwoyo.*
> (Imitation made the rabbit break off its tail.)
> -*Acholi Proverb*

The Acholi tribe, is one the tribes of the Luo people, which is part of the Nilotic ethnic group. The Nilotic peoples are those who live along the Nile River, and are one of the oldest people groups in Eastern Africa, expanding across the lands from South Sudan,

[188] Gilian Edube.

Uganda, Kenya, and parts of Tanzania.[189] They are also the second most populous people groups only following the Bantu. The Acholi themselves are mostly settled in northern Uganda. The Acholi people are incredibly industrious, communal, joyful, creative, and perseverant. Historically, they have been through generational trauma upon trauma from every direction, and yet are resilient through it all with a hope that defies logic and forgiveness that rarely seen. In the past 6 generations of Acholi memory, their people have suffered extraordinary atrocities: from kidnapping and forced slavery by the Arabs, colonial oppression of British rule, grooming of their bodies for war, tribal neglect by oppositional governmental rule, internal uprising turned betrayal and civil war from within their own tribe, and violence of war upon innocent lives in retaliation by those sent to bring peace. And yet, the Acholi Church is marked by forgiveness, reconciliation, generosity, hospitality, and joyful embrace.

The Arab slave trade traversed the Nile and kidnapped darker skinned Africans. After doing a health and beauty screening, they would march the survivors of the screenings in chains around their necks across the plains and up the Nile in order to be sold in the Egyptian market. This is what happened to the Acholi - the story is still retold at what is now known as Fort Patiko, one of the main screening and execution sites of kidnapped Acholi.[190] The Arabs used this natural rock formation in northern Uganda to gather and hold dozens to one hundred people in squashed crevices under rocks. Men shoved under one rock, women under another, awaiting the excruciating judgment of whether their bodies were worth the trek investment by their capturers. The large open

[189] Assa Okoth and Agumba Ndaloh, "Peak Revision K.C.P.E. Social Studies," East African Educational Publishers Nairobi Kenya (2006): 60–62.
[190] Multiple in person visits to Fort Patiko hearing the exact same oral narration of the history from national park guides in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2019.

rock with a gradual decline was the execution site for the rebellious, sick, elderly, or those deemed too ugly. The blood stains of beheadings and ax marks are etched in the rocks today, as Uganda remembers the horrors and gather locals or tourists to see the gruesome history of their land. The heads and bodies were rolled down the inclined rock after the machete beheadings, where lions were kept and waited to eat the human remains. Nearby, on another ledge of the rock, was the rifle execution site for those who tried to escape and run away from their kidnappers. They were shot and pushed off a ledge, where there too awaited the lions.

This rock formation is now known as Fort Patiko, as a Brit by the name of Sir Samuel Baker and wife Florence, who was formerly a slave herself, discovered the atrocity on one of their journeys through the northern counties as they were mapping out the Nile. In 1869, they made it their full-time endeavor to stop the Arab slave trade and bring liberation to the Luo people. Since by the mid-19th century Uganda was a British colony, they returned to request for British military aid to drive out the slave traders. Sir Samuel Baker and Lady Florence were welcomed to remain living in Acholiland as they had been fighting for several years with the local tribal leaders for the abolition of slavery for the region and had quickly learned the language.

When speaking with a local Acholi grandma who identifies as Anglican, Layado Cecilia,[191] she speaks of the stories of Sir Samuel Baker as a good Christian man who saw the Acholi as his own brotherhood and was willing to engage with violent slave traders to free his brothers and sisters. Her words have a similar compassion when speaking of the Arabs: "They did terrible things. But what must they have been suffering

[191] This oral interview happened between Petek Altuğ and Layado Cecilia in September 2015.

to drive them to do such things? My God!"[192] This perspective to name atrocities and hold humans with open hands of brethren suffering rather than 'othering' them is one of the more common than would be expected perspectives held by many Ugandan Christians when reflecting upon the decades of war, violence, and innocent lives suffering in their nation.

With the British 19th century intervention also came British rule. While there had often been ethnic tension and fighting over particular land and resources, issues of tribalism were exacerbated by colorism favoritism brought in by the British. This colorism under colonial rule channeled the Acholi darker skinned bodies into the military and national manual labor. They were suppressed from entering the academic, political, and governmental realms where their lighter skinned counter-parts were readily welcomed, trained, trusted, and invested in by the colonial powers. With most of the army being manned by northern Ugandans, during the back and forth of governmental power grabs from Apollo Milton Obote to Idi Amin to Yoweri Museveni, hundreds of thousands of Ugandans lost their lives. Idi Amin and Yoweri Museveni, in particular, targeted the northern Ugandans for their military support of former prime minister and independence leader Apollo Obote following the independence from British rule.

Layado Cecilia identifies herself as an Anglican woman. Her life experiences speak of the depths of her faith and transformative power that her faith has had on her family and community. During the time of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) upraising, led by Joseph Kony, both she and her husband interacted face to face with the rebel army's leader. The LRA formed in 1986, led by Joseph Kony in hopes of overthrowing

[192] Layado Cecilia, September 12, 2015 Face to Face Interview with Layado Cecilia, Face to Face, September 2015.

the Museveni led government, in effort to protect the northern Ugandan tribes from discrimination and needless death.[193] When his uprising failed in 1986, he turned on his own people, the Acholi, blaming them as traitors and insinuating the failure as their betrayal of him. This led to over two decades of internal civil war. In response he started abducting children, some adults as well, ransacking and burning villages to increase and feed his growing army. He forced his abductees to kill family members to save their own lives. In addition to his military tactics, he also claimed to be the 'Chosen one' and a prophet with spiritual powers. He conducted a ceremony of water marking each abductee or recruit with a cross, claiming it would protect their bodies from bullets, and trained them to fight or be forced into sex slavery. Joseph Kony is the man that the leader Cecilia followed and confronted when her husband disappeared when she was told he had been abducted by Joseph Kony's army.

Her husband was an Acholi minister who would frequently travel the village roads visiting neighbors, widows, orphans, to pray for the sick, the grieving, and teaching those gathered in fellowship. According to Cecilia, he had once previously encountered Kony and his rebel army on his journeys, being told by them he should go home and not be out caring for people. He replied to them that he was a minister of the word of God, and that God would protect him. His people were hurting and struggling, so he needed to visit them to offer them hope and care. They threatened him to say if he continued, they would kill him. He told them he was not afraid of them. That time they let him go. However, one evening when young Cecilia was awaiting the return of her husband and he never showed up, she became greatly concerned. She had recently given birth to triplets

[193] Faith J. H. McDonnell and Grace Akallo, Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children (Grand Rapids, Mich: Chosen, 2007), 24–25.

and her body was still recovering from the delivery; however, she knew in her heart he was in trouble, so she picked up her babies, and asked her care taker to come with her while holding the third child. They set off to find the LRA.[194]

For most Ugandans, there was great fear of the LRA, as they would attack at any hour of day or night, whether on their journey to school, working in the fields, or coming home at night. A majority of children started walking to town centers to sleep together in large clusters that were theoretically protected by guards, rather than fear for abduction in their remote villages. Cecilia describes her journey as one of mixed fear and tremendous courage. She was angry that her husband had been abducted, as had been confirmed by others, and not sure what would happen to herself and her children if he was gone. Holding closely to God, she knew in her heart she would be okay even if she had to plead with Kony face to face to release her husband. When she came upon some LRA rebels, she asked to speak to their commander, they escorted them for 2 days to the LRA headquarters. She was granted permission to speak to Kony, and it is definitely a testimony of the power of God's angel army, that neither she, her babies, nor the young care-taker girl with her were touched, hurt, or harmed. She said she prayed and God told her to request for her husband back, that he had 3 young babies and she needed him at home. She was pleading with Kony on behalf of her husband. She said Kony listened to her but denied her request. He informed her that her husband was still alive, but that he would not be released. In her recounting of her story, it was a bit unclear if it was a dream or if she actually received a message, but she shared that what turned her around to head back towards home was hearing from her husband that if he was to be captured by the LRA and Kony refused to release him, that her husband would trust that this was the

[194] Layado Cecilia, September 12, 2015 Face to Face Interview with Layado Cecilia.

ministry place God had brought him to preach hope, truth, and light. Hearing this, she knew that he loved her and she knew God would take care of her. She left and walked the long journey home.

Throughout the years of struggle for food, for shelter, for employment, as a widow and mother, she never lost hope in God, never blamed God, and never stopped seeking to serve, love, and care for others as her husband had. Over twenty years later, she was hired to work with formerly abducted child mothers and child soldiers. These young women had also been abducted like her husband and forced to serve in the LRA as soldiers, commander brides, or both. Some of the young women she has invested in over the past 15 years were partaking in the massacres that ransacked the village of Lukodi.[195] Others were the wives of lead commanders and others, like herself, survivors of these raids of war with physical and emotional scars to show. Yet with every single one of the young women and their children that she works with, Cecilia has hope to believe in who these women can become, daily invests in their future, and knows that whatever they were forced to do, through repentance and forgiveness, they will might one day be able to return and be welcomed home with love and care from the community around.

This is not just the faith and story of Cecilia, but her story is an example of the faith of Ugandan believers across the nation. Many Christians recognized that the LRA was not a true representation of Christianity nor of Christ's Holy Spirit movement despite their claims as the Lord's Resistance Army and claims of prophecy. The Ugandan Church recognized that Anglicans, Catholics, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and 'Born-Agains' alike were all suffering at the hands of the LRA, as well as their Ugandan

[195] Lukodi is a small village in the Gulu district of northern Uganda. It was the site of one of the LRA massacres in 2004.

brethren of other faiths. After seeing the decades of failed national military attempts to thwart the violence of the LRA with its increasing numbers of abductions, massacres, and seemingly insider knowledge escapes from a military raid, the Ugandan Church committed themselves to fasting and prayer across ecumenical lines. As shared in countless stories of local pastors and believers, this gathering of spiritual power in Christ broken through chains of supernatural reign.

The 2005 documentary, *An Unconventional War,*[196] directed by George Otis Jr, follows the journey of the 139 abducted schoolgirls from St. Mary's in Aboke, northern Uganda. Like Cecilia, their headmistress Sister Rachelle Fassera, followed the rebel army to seek the release of the girls, offering her own life in their place. A hundred and nine girls were released through her pleading, and the remaining 30 retained by the LRA. The parents of these 30, along with the other Aboke formerly abductee parents, gathered to grieve, fast, and pray. They had learned from the released Aboke girls that Joseph Kony had spirits speak to him to tell him when the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) was about to encircle, and they would relocate. The gathering of parents, praying and fasting, also started rallying pastors and priests across the nation.

Rather than looking down on the Acholi people for the civil war, believing they brought it on themselves as many other Ugandans presumed, the abductions of the boarding schoolgirls was a wakeup call that the LRA was an extremist group with supernatural power that needed to be addressed by the church, not just the military. Rallying turned into gatherings and prolonged corporate fasts, 24 hours 7 days a week intercession, and specifically planned expeditions to reclaim the rivers and other

[196] George Jr. Otis, TransformNations Media, and Sentinel Group, An Unconventional War, Color, NTSC, Full Screen (Lynnwood, VA: The Sentinel Group, 2005).

watermarking locations that the LRA was using for their sacred ceremonies. Pastors and lay leaders raised funds to physically go and pray in these spaces, renouncing the evils, praying for deliverance, cleansing the areas, and baptizing people in the water, rebuking any spirits that would remain. Soon after these gatherings, word spread that more and more child soldiers and brides were finding ways to escape and flee from the LRA to safety. The UPDF could not explain the transition, but after decades of being unable to locate the LRA, the LRA was seemingly becoming weaker and less resilient in guarding against their attacks.

One former child soldier retells hearing Joseph Kony address the LRA troops saying that the spirits were leaving him and he wasn't hearing from them like he used to. They needed to leave Uganda and heading in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The Ugandan Church celebrated the spiritual shift in the nation and repented for the years it had taken them to do something about LRA's attacks against northern Uganda. "The impacts of the conflict have been devastating, characterized by the displacement of over 1.8 million people into internally displaced people (IDP) camps, loss of lives, and abduction of over 38,000 children by the LRA to serve as child soldiers and sex slaves."[197]

During these years, when the world watched in silence or horror, the Holy Spirit was alive and at work in the Acholi people, speaking to them, leading them, rescuing them, delivering them from the snatches of evil. One former LRA abductee, Grace Akallo, one of the 30 retained Aboke girls and co-author of *Girl Soldier,* shared about the still small whisper that she heard while she was captured and forced to serve as a child soldier by the LRA.

[197] "The Lukodi Massacre 19th May 2004," JRP Field Note XIII, April 2011, 5.

> *Our guns were still strapped onto our backs, because a gun meant life. Without it there was no life in the LRA. After crossing the water and walking for a long time, there was a whisper in my heart, telling me that if we kept the guns we would get killed. I was learning to listen to this gentle voice that spoke to my heart. This time what was said was hard to accept. I didn't know how I would convince my friends to throw away what seemed to be their last hope. The voice would not leave me alone. It continued to whisper in my ears to drop the guns.*[198]

Grace responded in faith and was delivered from the LRA. Her story is not the only one, countless former abductees who were forced to beat other children who refused to obey LRA commands, shoot and loot, given to be raped and beaten at will as sex slaves to commanders, child brides, or child soldiers share similar experiences.

Christine, a ChildVoice graduate and former LRA abductee, shared a similar experience. However, for her, rather than hearing a voice, it was a vision of a man in white. After months and years of capture, in exhaustion, she fell into a field and begged for God to either allow her to die or deliver her from the LRA. She could not bear the pressure to continue in the ways of burning villages, shooting innocent victims, suffering group rape to placate the male soldiers, just for the sake of her own life to be spared another day. She thought she was dreaming from exhaustion, but it became quiet around her, everything was still in the midst of the tall bush grass that was hiding their tracks. She saw a man in white calling towards her and telling her to run towards him and to run now. She looked around and didn't see anyone and got up and started running. It was not her first time trying to escape, she had wounds and scars on her body to remind her of previous attempts. But this time something was different, she ran for as long as she could and never reached the man. The next thing she remembers is getting to a road and seeing people who looked different from her, people of another tribe and language. She feared

[198] McDonnell and Akallo, Girl Soldier, 173.

speaking in Acholi for fear of her life and the assumptions they might make about her, but she was greeted with peace, smiles, and a tender grandma who noticed her bleeding and wounds, wanting to care for her body. One thing led to another, Christine was granted amnesty as she surrendered and provisions were made for her to be taken to a trauma healing and rehabilitation center for former child soldiers and child brides, along with other war-torn adolescent girls in Lukodi, just outside Gulu in Uganda. She shares her story readily and is one of the first up in the mornings to praise God, calling and gathering others in worship. She leads times of prayer, worship, and praise as she knows the One who rescued her and saved her from the living nightmare that she was trapped in with no way out. Healing takes years, but she knows God continues to hold her and heal her, and she remains steadfast to Him knowing He alone gives hope to those in despair.

Contributions of Ugandan Church at Large: Indigenous Missional Movements

The Ugandan church deeply values the great commission. Yet their valuing of this Scripture plays out differently than what is most often seen in the North Atlantic Church. For Ugandans, the sending out is always a team effort, of people gathered together, anointed by the Holy Spirit, and going out with one another and with the power of the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of Jesus. They go out praying with authority for deliverance of those oppressed by demons, anxiety, depression, and praying in authoritative faith for healing of the sick, in the Name of Jesus. The word commission is rooted in Old French and Latin "commissiō ("sending together; commission")" including the prefix of 'com' implying "with" along with the action noun 'missiō' ("sending"). Often times, other cultures or countries, especially those from a more individualistic

mindset see it as an individual being 'sent out' rather than a communal calling to be collectively sent.

One of Gilian's heart passions is to develop and disciple the next generation of young adults in the Christian faith, such that their faith is deep, sincere, robust, and something that overflows from their hearts and lives to impact their communities in significant life-changing ways. Along with a few of her colleagues in 2012, they founded Global Link Afrika (GLA), an indigenous missions training, developing, and sending organization to help train up and equip Ugandans to share the truth of the Gospel rooted in Scripture. Ugandan university students graduate in their vocational training and then commit a year or more to be trained and sent to a different area of the country where there are vocational needs in the area. They are given ministry training, as well as pastoral care themselves through spiritual encouragement. Their hope is through bivocational ministry they are able to offer spiritual encouragement to others, truth, and sharing of the Gospel with others to know the truth of God through Christ Jesus.

When sharing about her experiences serving alongside her husband in Uganda, she remarks about the communal nature which gathers and draws people in faith, but also gives a shadow space to hide in the church if one has fallen out of belief in God:

> *You know, many people would have an individual faith that they follow a church, or they follow because they go to this place, or they go to these places, so they belong. And so, it's not falling out of Christianity, that is a problem. It would be falling out of that organization or falling out of that church, that is a problem. But you will not notice when they have fallen out of Christianity, because it's mostly associations and that's how we have faith lived out, it's very communal. And so that would then mean you have lots of shallow Christianity. And that's, I think, a statement that has been said several times to be wide and very shallow but not deep. And that's because of some of those factors that I'm talking about. You have influences of culture, but also you you're collectively living as a group. That I have seen even in in Global Link Afrika, you have people not able*

> *to critically think, why they believe and what it is they believe in, and they are not safe to go to that area because they want to be saved in a community. And for that reason, they never communicate if they're ever found alone having to defend their faith, they wouldn't be able to do it. And that makes it shallow. (April 27, 2021)*[199]

Gilian remarks how there is a need and part of the drive of her own academic pursuit for Ugandan and East African spiritual formation for missionaries and pastors. When given resources from Western missionaries, Ugandans don't know what to do with them and even pretend they followed them, but really were overwhelmed by Western disciplines such as a retreat of silence or sitting and journaling their thoughts. Gilian remarks how in her years of training, the moments where most of the significant conversations, realizations of God's formation in their lives, growth, and deeper roots happened TOGETHER. Whether in a conversation while traveling on a bus, hiking a mountain, walking through a forest together even if in silence although better if in conversation, these are the moments of spiritual formation where faith takes root for individuals within the community. Faith is not formed apart from community as it does not make sense in Ugandan culture. If someone is quiet and on their own, questions about their mental and emotional health are made. Even physical health is questioned as it is not good to be quiet and alone. To be quiet in a group is fine, that can be someone's personality. To be loudly singing and dancing in a room on your own can also be someone's personality. But being quiet and alone is not easily understood, and thus many of the Western spiritual disciplines do not help form but rather paint foreign and inauthentic canvases of faith that are not really rooted or established deeply in their heart language of connecting with God at all.

[199] Gilian Edube, April 27, 2021 Zoom Interview with Gilian.

Her current studies are how to contextualize spiritual formation within an East African context for the Global Church to learn from indigenous people, rather than for local pastors and missionaries to only receive what has worked in other cultures. Additionally, the formation of pastors and training of pastors is incredibly important as currently it only takes a word from God in prayer and a magazine in one's hand, for someone to step forward to plant a church and stand in the pulpit. Gilian laments over how this shallow faith has spread beyond members into the spaces of leadership, driving her own studies and investment to raise up more equipped local leaders. The younger generation of Christians that she meets with and trains with give her hope of deeper formed teachings from a Ugandan context to preach the Scriptures of God through the local lens and communal education. Her dream is to create a local training school for theological students to study and develop their own theology in Uganda, theology in East Africa, in their context as well as in dialogue with the Global Church.

> *That's why we started Ignite. Ignite missions convention: this targets pastors, and the church [in Uganda]. Pastors and churches. And it's basically asking those questions of "What's the strategy right now? What is my church doing right now? Where do we need to go? What are the discipleship issues? You know, what is my growth?" Many people have said to us that is the first conference that they have sat and had to consider, you know, like, "What is it that I'm doing?" ...And that was the last question that we got from Ignite "Like, yes, so I have heard that, you know, we need discipleship, we need to get deeper, we need to do Bible study, we need to do these, we need to get training, and out of Ignite, we've actually had pastors going for training. But then there are those who are thinking, what is it that we need to do? And so we get to train them to think about what's important? What's the most important thing for you as a church? Is it missions? What is it? And so I think that there is hope, there is hope… [I am] praying that they will actually pray that there would be another East Africa revival, you know!*[200]

[200] Gilian Edube.

Her hope for the future of Uganda is from the rising of young Christian leaders who wrestle with how the cultural syncretism has been previously digested wholly by older generations, or have completely abandoned their own roots to swallow Western customs and theologies brought in by foreign missionaries.

> *Yeah, I think that the young are [bringing hope for the future]. And that's one of the reasons I value being able to work with young people. Because I think that the young generation is starting to wrestle with those things. Wrestle with the tradition, wrestle with the shallowness, wrestle with lack of training. Or in my circle, which I don't think is a white one, you get people interested in studying, you know, not wanting to start churches before they have done some theological training….And they chose to probably do a one year or two-year theological course. And now they're pastors and for me, that's hopeful! And you go to those churches, and you know, however much they might not look or do a lot [like big churches]- like they have some structure. They have like a framework. They're not just picking a magazine and preaching. And for me that's very, very encouraging…For me, that's really helpful because they're going to be the future leaders. And they already are the leaders right now!...So I think the fact that we have some of those people getting trained, you know, Solomon doing theology in our own like taking up courses that are either missional or theological, for me is very exciting. I know that the future is in the church, in the church of Uganda and young people as well…You know, when you engage them, like when you do courses then they get to go through the realities of culture- And what does it mean for them, then they start wrestling with [cultural] issues. And right now, you have many of them getting married and asking the right questions, you know, like, what does this mean? Like, what would I do as a Christian? Like, what am I even supposed to do? I mean, the fact that they actually are thinking about these questions for me is very exciting. Because, yeah, like it shows, there is something that is happening in the lives of young people in Uganda. Yeah, so I would say it wouldn't represent the bigger church really…I have interacted with these mega churches, I still feel pity because they are not interested in going to give in needy areas, and like start new churches in those communities. But that's why we started Ignite. Ignite missions convention, it targets pastors, and the local church.*[201]

James O'yet, a young Acholi man who survived the LRA's attacks on his own village in the Gulu district, is now working up in South Sudan with South Sudanese child soldiers. Being Ugandan in South Sudan is quite noticeable, but as he comes to train

[201] Gilian Edube.

alongside the soldiers with other Christian military members, they build trust and relationships across tribal lines. When speaking with him, he said:

> *NGOs have been trying for a long time to bring peace between the fighting tribes. But it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is finally bringing peace. When we go, we want their hearts to change so they do not fight and kill each other. But they need God's love in their hearts and they need forgiveness before they can choose to forgive each other. In the past 16 months while I was there, we saw many of these soldiers come to faith and now many of them are helping others overcome their sin, their anger, their hate, and learning to forgive one another too.*[202]

The testimony of James is a reminder that for him, as well as many other Acholi Christians, and Ugandan Christians at large, the Gospel brings physical peace and shalom between communities as much as it brings peace and shalom between people and God. They have seen and witnessed with their own eyes the power of God ending violence, war, strife, rape, and constant attacks or bombardments in their own villages through prayer, proclamation of the Gospel of peace, the cost of love poured out to offer forgiveness at the cross, and the power of the resurrection breaking through what humans cannot do on their own. This is a living reality for them and it is what motivates them to go live and serve among their neighbors in South Sudan who are still suffering from war and strife. South Sudan is still at war among themselves as numbers of rebel armies arise to fight against the ruling parties. While others might fear going to South Sudan due to the current state of war and fighting, James, and others like him, know the power of God in their own lives and desire for the South Sudanese to receive Christ in their hearts, because they know in Christ and through Christ alone, everything changes. "We were ambushed by the rebels while we were there, but it wasn't bad. God was our protector

[202] James Oyet, May 14, 2021 Video Call Interview with James Oyet.

and he has always been so faithful all these years."[203] He went on to share how they were originally serving only among the youth soldiers, sharing faith, witnessing, and sharing God's love with those they were being trained alongside. He joined the South Sudanese military training for the sake of befriending and building trust with the South Sudanese themselves. Over time now, they have had the opportunity to speak to leaders and commanders, and they are seeing God touching the hearts of those who have been deeply traumatized with pain and hate from what they have experienced themselves over the years.

Even while in South Sudan, James has been asked about why he is there and it is pointedly declared that he is Ugandan, people ask if he wants to bring Ugandan culture to them. During a video interview with him on May 14th, 2021, he shared some of his experience: "Yes, I am Ugandan, but I do not want to bring Ugandan culture. I want to bring Jesus culture. The Gospel is not Ugandan, it is the Word of God for all people, and He offers His love and forgiveness to you as South Sudanese as much as He does to me. You do not need to become Ugandan to be a Christian."[204] While James like many others might bring some sort of cultural syncretism with him as he shares his faith from his lived experience as a Ugandan man, he is also consciously aware of the different cultures around and knows the pride, as well as the tension, that arises between tribes, especially when there have been generational feuds and exchanges of oppression and bloodshed. Forgiveness day to day between two individuals is hard enough but breaking the generational animosity and choosing to say 'never again' when one's culture deeply

[203] James Oyet.
[204] James Oyet.

honors their ancestors is possible only through life-transformation in Christ, a different familial bloodline to hold onto and honor above one's own tribe.

The reality of the spiritual realm intersecting and interacting with the physical realm is non-debatable for Ugandans. From the animistic worldview of their ancestors, the spiritual realm's influence on daily life events is a known reality for everyone. This is in contrast to a secular worldview, which states that the physical realm is completely separate from any spiritual realm, if a spiritual realm even exists. These two opposing worldviews are at complete odds with one another with respect to understanding the forces and influences at work in the world today. In the worldview outlined in the Bible, there is both an understanding of the existence of a spiritual and physical realm, with influence between the two in both directions. It is not a guaranteed phenomenon where every action in the physical has ramifications in the spiritual, nor the reversal. However, there are times where the spiritual does influence the physical and times where the physical influences the spiritual. Christians across the globe fall along a spectrum of how they would articulate their perception of the interplay between the two realms, usually closely related to whether their cultural background is more strongly rooted in a secularistic or an animistic tradition.

Ugandans' strong belief in God's power to intersect and intervene in the physical world is one of the gift's the Ugandan Christians bring to the Global Church and emphasizes the omnipotent omnipresence of God. For them, it is not a theological debate or academic dialogue to describe God in theory, but a belief that shapes their prayers and orthopraxy, grounded in the testimonies of seeing God's mighty hand intervene time and again in ways that only a God who is completely other can do. The attributes of God

known to the local Ugandan believer are known through learning to trust God daily, walking with the Holy Spirit in prayer, and having faith to believe in things they cannot see, while remembering the testimonies of the faithful who have gone before. It is one thing for Christians to know the testimony of God delivering the Israelites from Pharaoh and leading them across the Red Sea out of Egypt, but it is amplified when the powerful acts of deliverance are from one's own story and the story of those immediately who have gone before to retell during their lifetime.

From the forgiveness and deliverance from the Arab slave trade to British colonial rule, to Ugandan independence shortly followed by the reign of Ida Amin, to decades of rebel war in northern Uganda by the LRA, Ugandan Christians are still marked by joy, rejoicing with testimonies, celebrations of all God has done and carried them through, generosity, open hands extended, and prayers for their enemies despite all the pain, suffering, devastation, and loss they have suffered. They hold hope against all hope knowing the One who rescues and saves them, physically and spiritually, now and forever.

Eschatological Theology Cultivating Ecological Conservation

One of the greatest contributions that the East African church and AICs across the continent have contributed towards global Kingdom discipleship is in the development of a theology of ecology. With a cultural understanding of time as being cyclical, this lends the perspective that the development of a 'new Jerusalem' as Revelation 21:1-5 speaks of is a coming Kingdom into the earth now. As such, when "the One seated on the throne

said, 'Look! I am making everything new,"[205] this passage is interpreted as a continual and ongoing process of restoration of all things, including the land, nutrients, vegetation, animals, water, and rest of creation. If the new Kingdom is coming in the here and now as time cyclically repeats itself, the actions or lack thereof in the present moment have significant ramifications for the future of the Church and of God's people.

Genesis speaks of God's instructions to humanity being: "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth."[206] And "The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it."[207] This commandment is read in conjunction with Revelation, as being part of the same lens to view the role of humanity in relation to ecology. There has been and forever shall be a mandate on humanity to care for the environment, a working in coexistence of being part of the initial purpose to be together with God, with one another, and with creation in harmonious shalom. This mindset is credited to the Ugandan pastors who incorporate land as part of their local village church emphasizing that it is not just the building where they meet, nor the people who come that they are to care for, but the surrounding land so that the land will remain fertile for the next generation. Part of being a community church, such as the Lukodi Community Church in Gulu district of northern Uganda, is planting, growing, and harvesting things like sunflowers so that those hungry and traveling along the road on a long journey can have something to eat on their way. This care for the stranger as well as care for the land so that it remains fertile for others to who come after is ingrained in how living is understood; it is not discussed or analyzed.

[205] Revelation 21:5
[206] Genesis 1:28
[207] Genesis 2:15

Living in the moment, with a forever widened eye on those who have come before and those who are yet to come, keeps one's hands actively working and caring for the land, limiting the use of natural resources, and having hope in the God of Revelation's promises that He too is amidst making all things new. The theological framework that arises is one where the believer who is following Christ is not just working for their ancestors and descendants to come as their non-believing peers might, but also for participating in the ecological sustenance and restoration of the 'new Jerusalem' that is promised. In a cyclical worldview of time, nothing can come that does not have some sort of participation or connectedness with the efforts of today. It is a counter-Western cultural view of time, which is deeply necessary for adding to the understanding of people who have lived their entire existence understanding that time in a linear fashion of a calendar is a social construct. Kenyan theologian John Mbiti[208] paints the picture of "Long Past" and "Dynamic Present" in such a way that the "Future" is nonexistent. He applies this concept of time not just to his reading of Scripture, such as Revelation, but additionally "to its relevance for the prevailing sociopolitical, economic, and religious challenges on the African continent."[209]

Similarly, to the impact on ecology, the cyclical understanding of time, greatly aids in the understanding of a coming hope that can be experienced both now and in the years to come. John D.K. Ekem remarks on how Revelation 21:1-4 is "a beacon of hope for those in distressing situations, particularly in Africa, where multiple challenges

[208] John S. Mbiti, Kenyan born East African theologian, formerly ordained Anglican priest and commonly referred to as the "Father of Modern African theology". New Testament Eschatology in an African Background"

[209] John S. Mbiti, New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 24, 83–85.

confront people in the social, religious, political, and economic spheres."[210] This cyclical framework also lends itself towards a rich understanding of God's sanctification process of all things, beginning now, and continuing into eternity. Rather than sanctification being an individualized and linear process, as is often posed by non-African theologians, it is posed as a communal ongoing cyclical process.

Sister Anne and Father Waliggo share similar sentiments when explaining how their understandings of Christ, as Ugandan and East African believers, punctuates the Christological models that emerge informing the Christian way of life in East Africa. These models are namely "eschatological, anthropological, liberational, and cosmological."[211] In the eschatological model, "Christ is sent by God to an alienated world where the presence of God takes the shape of the Crucified One…In his suffering Christ took on the conditions of the African woman and conditions of the whole of humanity, and in his resurrection the African woman is called to participate in the restoration of harmony, equality, and inclusiveness in all human relationships in the family, society, and church."[212] Additionally, in the anthropological one, "God calls us in Christ to a lifestyle that is dedicated to the love of neighbor and to a life which puts others first and gives them life."[213] In the liberational model of Christ, He does not ask the African "to accept her hardships and pain fatalistically but to work at eliminating the sufferings and creating a better place for all. In her undertaking against the oppressive structures her struggles become God's struggles. It is then Christ who suffers in her and

[210] Green, Pardue, and Yeo, p. 627.
[211] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience," 77.
[212] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, 77.
[213] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, 77.

works in her to give birth to new and better human relationships."[214] Fr. Waliggo articulates the primary question central to a Christology in a situation of suffering as being part of Christians call to be part of God's creating of a new world:

> *Jesus inaugurated the restoration of individuals and societies to wholeness and he invited the disciples to participate in this re-establishment. As Christians and as women who have seen the liberating power of Christ we have two functions to fulfill: first of all to witness to God's love and care for the universe; and second to give testimony to the continued human responsibility of creating a new world.*[215]

The Ugandan Church offers glimpses of joy amidst suffering, radical forgiveness, tenacious prayer in the Holy Spirit, indigenous missional movements for the sake of the Gospel, and theologies that help us grow as the Church towards ecological conservation. While the Ugandan Church, like the Turkish Church, and every other Church has blindspots, these are just a few of the gifts the Ugandan Church offers to the Global Church at large. As for all of us as believers, we must draw near to one another, to listen and heed for theological growth and transformation, seeing the Kingdom of God in others to help us reflect back where we have neglected these truths of His Kingdom in our own worldview. Perhaps even entering into the stories of others' such that the growth of the Body of Christ would be rooted in 1 Corinthians 12:26 where "when one part suffers, ever part suffers with it, if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" and learning how to be courageous amidst trouble remembering that Christ has overcome the world.[216]

[214] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, 78.
[215] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, 80.
[216] John 16:33

Chapter 5

Growing towards Kingdom Likeness as the Global Church: Learnings & Implications

> *After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:*
>
> *"Salvation belongs to our God,*
> *who sits on the throne,*
> *and to the Lamb."*
>
> — Revelation 7:9-10, NIV

Revelation 7:9-10 gives an image of the Kingdom of God, of those surrounding the Lord God's throne. This image of the Kingdom is an image of the Bride of Christ being made up of all people, cultures, languages, and tribes. No one has a greater place of importance than any other, and no one has lost their own culture, ethnicity, tribe, or language in exchange for another. Of all the things gifted to the Body of Christ here on earth, the gift of ethnicity is an eternal gift. Most of the other gifts are for the sake of mission, which are only needed until Christ's return, or are reflections of God's presence in believers, such as the fruits of the Spirit. If ethnicities are eternal, they are not a random attribute or even a holy sacrament for life on earth, such as marriage, from which "death do us part." Ethnicities and cultures, if part of the Kingdom of God, must reflect God and glorify Him. If there is a diversity of ethnicities in the Kingdom of God, it is in the coming together of all the cultures and ethnicities that the Body of Christ is most holy and redeemed as the purified Bride of Christ.

There is beauty and intentionality in the gifts God gives His children. God is intentional in the creation of His children, as Psalm 139:13-14 says: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." And Genesis 1:26-27 speaks of the fact that humanity is made in *imago Dei*:

> *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*
>
> *So God created mankind in his own image,*
> *in the image of God he created them;*
> *male and female he created them.*

The uniqueness of ethnicities, peoples, and languages, which God has placed into each individual and people group, reflects here on earth an eternal reality of His Kingdom. It is in the collective gathering of believers from all people groups that a clearer vision of the Kingdom of God is seen. There is no individual ethnicity that fully reflects the Kingdom of God on its own. Thus, it is in coming together through the Holy Spirit and being refined by the Holy Spirit that is living in each person that a glimpse of this Kingdom reality is seen.

A yearning for God's Kingdom is within each believer and within each community of believers pursuing worship of and fellowship in the Lord Jesus Christ. This yearning points to a reality that what is before us is not yet the fullness of God's Kingdom. Glimmers of the Kingdom bursting through the hearts, homes, communities, nations, and the world point to the Holy Spirit's ongoing work of individual and collective sanctification. There can be a passive process to engage in this slow working of the Holy Spirit, or there can be a proactive pursuit of the Kingdom. Humble

fellowship where listening comes before speaking[217] and confession to a believer leading to repentance[218] is seen as holy as rejoicing with psalms of joy together in the Body of Christ. Where there is a greater desire to grow in Christ-likeness and to receive rebuke, teaching, correcting, and training in all righteousness[219] from the Holy Spirit's revelation to Global siblings, than there is a desire to teach and preach to others ourselves. To grow in Christ-likeness as an individual as well as a communal endeavor because it is the Body of Christ; it is the Church, the bride of Christ, needing to be prepared for the holy everlasting union when Christ returns.

It is as essential to the discipleship of the Church, as is it to the witness of the Church in the world, that the Church be refined to more fully reflect the Kingdom of God. The refining of our faith through cross-cultural engagement and formation with believers of different backgrounds is essential part of our Christian formation process. Whether this engagement comes directly through building personal relationships or through humble listening and learning through songs, worship, sermons, letters, or stories shared from believers across the nations, it would be willful negligence to close our eyes and ears to the voices of brethren across the Globe out of potential discomfort of having our own thoughts pruned or exposed as syncretistic. Not engaging when possible to listen and learn from Global Church siblings not only stunts our own formation and discipleship growth towards Christ-likeness, but also gives us a stunted vision of the truth of God's Kingdom to the world that does not yet know the truth of God for themselves. It is essential to grow in our faith through growing in Kingdom-likeness with those who

[217] James 1:19
[218] James 5:16
[219] 2 Timothy 3:16-17

will one day surround the throne of God side-by-side proclaiming His salvation, honor, and glory forever and ever.

As previously stated, this process of distilling our vision of the Kingdom of God can only come through a humble posture willing to enter into intimate cross-cultural dialogue, trust, and partnership with brothers and sisters in the Global Church. Without this, self-reliance and cultural dominance remain prideful idols in minds, hearts, and entire communities, pulling forth the ethnocentric notion that our culturally biased interpretations are the supreme and ultimate sources of knowledge to be most trusted and in need of everyone else's full approval. In choosing to engage in cross-cultural dialogue, the hearer chooses to listen, to learn, and to draw near. Even in this very action of increasing proximity, false assumptions and biased opinions are exposed and challenged, and as trust grows through intimacy, the refining of thoughts is mutually achieved. It is part of the Christian journey to become more and more like Christ, and part of the journey as the Church is to become more purified and refined as the bride of Christ. Transformation needs to happen on the individual and communal level to grow in Christ-likeness, and in doing so, grow in Kingdom-likeness to be a greater witness to the world.

Transformation into Christ's likeness comes from listening, knowing truth, and living it out. To those whom he was preaching and teaching about the Kingdom of God, Jesus often leaves them with a statement to go live differently after hearing his words: "Go and do likewise,"[220] "Go sell your possessions,"[221] "Go and..."[222] Or He speaks to those proclaiming themselves as God-followers, that their actions expose the hypocrisy in

[220] Luke 10:37
[221] Matthew 19:21, Luke 12:33
[222] Matthew 19:21, Matthew 6:6, Matthew 28:19-20, John 8:11

their hearts and lack of transformation when they thought otherwise.[223] Relevant theology is theology grounded in faith that the truth of Jesus transforms our orthopraxy. Orthopraxy that does not reflect the Kingdom reflects the inner heart's learned theology more than its articulated theology. For Gospel heart transformations that clear the pathway from head to heart to hands enable fluidity from orthodoxy to orthopraxy, where both reflect the truth of the Kingdom of God and the heart of God.

The Church would do well to heed the experiences of the Turkish and Ugandan churches, as these experiences deeply form and give glimpses of a type of Kingdom living that might not always be seen as desirable in a world seeking comfort, yet is part of the way of the cross and following Christ as Lord which yields Kingdom fruit and Kingdom likeness. To learn from the embers of the faithful believers in Turkey how to stand firm, against governmental or nationalistic idolatry that seeks allegiance instead of Christ, yet continue to be marked as people of love, of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of faithfulness, and of perseverance. To learn from the repentance and humility of Turkish believers to apologize for the sins of past generations, grieving alongside those whose ancestors were tortured and murdered, and choosing to do the hard work to reconcile in the Body of Christ and be possibly known as a traitor to their own nation for choosing reconciliation over national identity. To learn from the Turkish believers as well as the Ugandan believers that suffering is part of the way of the cross of Christ, and to remain 'joyful in hope, patience in affliction, and faithful in prayer'[224] amidst physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, relational, and even vocational opposition to those choosing to claim Christ as Lord. To learn from Ugandan believers how to know that violence and

[223] Matthew 25:34-45, Luke 6:30-38, Matthew 23:1-28
[224] Romans 12:12

suffering is not what God desires for us, but to meet Him in our suffering, and to courageously seek Him for deliverance from suffering, fully trusting in the God who parted the Red Sea, and who healed the sick, the lame, the blind, and set the captives free to do likewise today as He has done before. To learn the depth of faith in Ugandan believers who have seen syncretistic faith produce shallow faith and say "no more", seeking to raise up local believers to be theologians, pastors, and leaders from the unique space in which their culture reflects the *imago Dei*. And to learn from Ugandan believers how as Christians to care for the creation God has placed us in, especially amidst a current global warming or climate change crisis that drastically impacts the daily livelihood of millions on the planet.

As heard from the voices of our Turkish and Ugandan siblings, it becomes more and more clear how the rest of the Church needs to listen and heed both the theological concept and holistic orthopraxy such that the fruit of the lives of believers in the Church, regardless of nationality or ethnicity, would bloom more when these Kingdom seeds are sown and seen in the majority world Church, seeds such as Sister Anne's articulation of the anthropological Christological model of loving neighbors such that our lives always put others first and offers them life. The same sentiment articulated in theologian Ziya Meral's reflections at the end of his piece on *A Theology of Guantanamo Bay*:

> *What is this Gospel? It speaks of love of the neighbour, which requires trust in God and taking the risk to care for the wounded Samaritan. It promotes inclusion of the 'other' and the restoration of their dignity rather than exclusion and dehumanization, which Jesus sharply and repeatedly condemned. This Gospel cherishes meekness and vulnerability, of loving and caring and humbling ourselves, rather than Nietzschean visions of great politicians who embody "strength" and "determination" to establish "our security" by moving beyond good and evil. It deconstructs the metaphysical "we" and "them" and unites us in the knowledge of our interdependence, createdness, vulnerability and need of*

> *forgiveness in the presence of a Holy God. The Gospel gives no room for concepts such as "collateral damage" or Machiavellian means. For this Gospel, every human being is precious and every human life is worth living, saving and mourning for. After all, this is exactly why Christ died on the cross. Finally, this Gospel is about forgiveness and reconciliation, rather than seeking revenge and brutal retribution.*[225]

Sister Anne's voice has been speaking into the evolution of the need for local theological development, as well as a word of prophetic lament and reflection for cultures that have failed to recognize that in the past.

> *Therefore, it is the task of the Western theologians to educate their people that Christianity has been too Euro-American centered to open up to other cultures in the world. The monopoly of Euro-American cultures in Christianity has hampered the adornment of the church with the colors and cultures of other peoples in the world. It has to be recognized that all cultures are relative and equally important. It is only in this realization that the church will move from a Euro-American centered church to a world-centered church*[226]*...In order to have mutuality, the psychological oppression that Africa has experienced and continues to experience has first to be removed, by realizing that every human grasp of the truth is finite and conditioned, while the divine reality and truth are always more than what can be humanly grasped and expressed. For genuine mutuality to take place, the Euro-American feeling of superiority with regard to culture, religious beliefs, and practices has to be overcome. The Euro-American experience is not the normative, but rather one of many ways by which God is encountered and manifested*.[227]

For some, reading Sister Anne's thoughts might feel hard to hear, yet it is not that Euro-Americans do not reflect *imago Dei; rather* she urges believers to not only hear and see the *imago Dei* through a Euro-American lens alone. Authors Soong-Chan Rah and Sarah Shin speak into this thought, reminding readers of the gift that white Western Christians bring to the Body of Christ. They highlight the truth of the *imago Dei* uniquely displayed and portrayed through their Western and Euro-American siblings when it

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[225] Ziya Meral, "A Theology of Guantanamo Bay."
[226] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Is Mutuality Possible? An African Response," Missiology: An International Review 29, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 46.
[227] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, 47.

comes to the Christian faith. Soong-Chan Rah writes, "One of Western Christianity's greatest contributions is the possibility of experiencing the grace of God on a personal and individual level."[228] Sarah Shin speaks of the gifts of Euro-Americans contribution to the development and unique reflection of *imago Dei* to the Kingdom of God:

> *Thinking of individualism as a gift is surprising to some. There are scores of sociology, anthropology, and race books that talk about the damage Western individualism has done in multiethnic settings. But it's one of many ways that God expresses his* imago Dei*. ...There is something beautiful about the Good Shepherd who values the life of a single sheep in the flock of ninety-nine. Individual stewardship is a gift and cultural distinctive of many white Americans. Used for kingdom purposes, it draws us deeper into prayerful individual intimacy with God and to obedience and faithfulness in mission.*[229]

Without the lens of Western Euro-American siblings, part of the understanding of faithfulness as a Christian is lost. And without the lenses of Turkish, Ugandan, Korean, Nigerian, Peruvian, Indian, Vietnamese, Native American, and the plethora of other nationalities, and even more ethnicities represented in each country of believers, much is also lost. Hearing the testimonies and culturally developed theologies of brothers and sisters from every culture, continent, and country would greatly aid in the overall growth, flourishing, and understanding of the fullness of the Kingdom of God. This thesis has barely scrapped the surface of even two cultural perspectives, but hopefully this small read has given a glimpse of how much wider the learning and broadening of our perspectives could be, as our blindspots are refined in the listening and learning from others who will one day stand equally by our side giving all the glory to God in the language, tongue, and with the God gifted ethnic inheritance God has gifted to each and every one of us. All cultures will inherently syncretize part of their culture with their

[228] Soong-Chan Rah, The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2009), 33.
[229] Shin, Beyond Color Blind, 33.

faith. While this is true, it is also true that God will carry on to completion the good work He has begun in each of us. Just as the apostles Peter and Saul were convicted about their inherent biases of what it meant to follow God from their background upbringing and understanding, upon encountering people from a different background following Jesus in a different way, their views were challenged and refined upon encountering God at work in these new cultures than how they had previously conceived. Their experience transformed their hearts and provided a more refined witness of God's truth to the world.

To heed the voice of Turkish Christians, such as the words and writings of researcher and theologian Ziya Meral, Ph.D., the Global Church grows in self-reflection and re-examination of the basic core principles of the Gospel, as seen through the Turkish lens.

> *At the very core of [Christ's] gospel lies inclusion, restoration and integration of those who have been dehumanized by the religious saints, pure ones, the civilized, 'we'. Much of his teachings criticize the hypocrisy of those who claim to know and love God when all the while their self-righteousness blinds them from the very core of knowing and loving God.*[230]

Most of this thesis has focused on addressing the ways in which cultures embrace and portray the Gospel from their unique vantage point, as well as having unique blindspots that necessitate the need for cross-cultural dialogue to shed light on the places enmeshed with culture in non-Kingdom like manners. However, even within a country, there are various cultures, some from people groups that are divided ethnically or through family clans, others socioeconomically, educationally, or physical abilities. In the same way that *imago Dei* is equally reflected across humanity, throughout time, history, and traversing geography, the Holy Spirit that takes residence within humanity, the *imago*

[230] Ziya Meral, "A Theology of Guantanamo Bay."

Dei, is equally reflected throughout all subcultures and people groups. He is as much among the poor, illiterate, and socially outcast as among the rich, educated, and socially desirable. If the theology and view of God and His Kingdom is only sought after or declared accurate from the perspective of the latter without regard to the former, humanity is missing part of the bigger picture and fullness of the Kingdom of God.

> *We seek [Christ] in vain in our modern-day cathedrals of glory and power and higher values. He is in the prison, with those who are hungry, naked and vulnerable. He warns us that he will hold us accountable, not because we have failed to meet him among 'us', but because we have not run to his image, the image of God, which is in prison, naked and hungry. Jesus identifies himself not with the powerful- who presume to decide which biological lives will be given the status of a human and thus granted political rights, and which ones will be reduced to mere physical existence- but rather with the despised, with the Homo Sacer*[231]*. If Jesus were caught living the vicious subversive Gospel today, he would not be on a wooden cross, since the wooden cross no longer symbolizes what it did then: the dishonouring and dehumanization of the individual in the presence of the entire city as a punishment. He would be wearing an orange jumper, living in a cage, dishonoured and dehumanized, in the presence of the entire world who behold all this on the TV screen.*[232]

This sentiment comes from a Middle Eastern believer, who studied at a prominent Evangelical seminary in the USA[233], in response to Guantanamo Bay in the aftermath of 9/11 wreaking havoc across the world for Muslim-majority nations and Middle Easterners seeking livelihoods in the West. His viewpoint written just years prior to James Cone's infamous theological work on *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, shares the same truth of a picture of Christ, with a different cultural analogy speaking the truth of

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[231] Ziya Meral refers to Homo Sacer earlier in his writings when referencing Philosopher Giorgio Agamben stating: "Philosopher Giorgio Agamben reminds us of the Roman figure homo sacer- the Sacred Man- who, according to the Roman law, can be killed with impunity but cannot be sacrificed to gods. His biological life is divorced from political life putting him outside of the boundaries of what constitutes a human and what the rights of that human are. He not only does not belong to the realm of the 'human', but neither to the reality of the gods. What is not human and what does not have a 'value' cannot be sacrificed to gods since its sacrifice would defile the sanctity of gods. Thus, homo sacer exists only as a biological body, not as a human. A Theology which ascribes such a status inevitably shapes political forms."

[232] Ziya Meral, "A Theology of Guantanamo Bay."

[233] Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA.

God and the Gospel to the people within the cultural context their theological reflections and works are being mostly received. James Cone writes:

> *The cross and the lynching tree interpret each other. Both were public spectacles, shameful events, instruments of punishment reserved for the most despised people in society. Any genuine theology and any genuine preaching of the Christian gospel must be measured against the test of the scandal of the cross and the lynching tree. 'Jesus did not die a gentle death like Socrates, with his cup of hemlock....Rather, he died like a [lynched black victim] or a common [black] criminal in torment, on the tree of shame.' The crowd shouted 'Crucify him!' (Mk 15:14) anticipated the white mob's shout 'Lynch him!' Jesus' agonizing final cry of abandonment from the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mk 15:34), was similar to the lynched victim Sam Hose's awful scream as he drew his last breath, 'Oh, my God! Oh, Jesus.' In each case it was a cruel, agonizing, and contemptible death.*[234]

> *The cross can heal and hurt; it can be empowering and liberating but also enslaving and oppressive. There is no one way in which the cross can be interpreted. I offer my reflections because I believe that the cross placed alongside the lynching tree can help us to see Jesus in America in a new light, and thereby empower people who claim to follow him to take a stand against white supremacy and every kind of injustice…The gospel of Jesus is not a rational concept to be explained in a theory of salvation, but a story about God's presence in Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed, which led to his death on the cross. What is redemptive is the faith that God snatches victory out of defeat, life out of death, and hope out of despair.*[235]

Two men from different cultures across the Globe, sharing perhaps their gender, access to higher education, and experiences as being a minority within a majority culture - one racially, and one religiously - come to similar conclusions from within their own cultural context. An articulation of the Gospel and the significance of Jesus' crucifixion that the rest of the nations need to hear. Holding these side by side in comparison illuminates and brings to light, parts of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God that shine the hope of God of the oppressed, with power of the resurrection through His victory over evil, death, and sin. It aids in bringing more perspectives and angles of how to see and

[234] James H. Cone, The Cross and the Lynching Tree (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).
[235] James H. Cone, The Cross and the Lynching Tree (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), xix.

consider the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, through the significance and meaning of his life, death through crucifixion, and resurrection. In reading and hearing, a small scraping of scales can begin, allowing some of the paint built up on the lenses from syncretism to be removed as proximity to brethren allows them to speak truth to expose our blindspots.

Previous missiologists and theologians have proposed frameworks to consider how to bring the gospel from one culture into another. Paul Hiebert proposes the metacultural framework (Figure 5.1), having a framework above all the other cultures through which to look at each culture. Robert Priest proposes the cultural blindspots diagram (Figure 5.2). Both of these are helpful tools in one regard to consider ways natural cultural inclinations view things and alternatives to consider growing in greater awareness of the presence of other cultural perspectives.

Beyond what they have already put forth, I would propose that there is an essentialness of mutual learning in a truly international hermeneutical community where every culture has a unique sliver of interpretation, understanding, and reflection of the Kingdom of God to be articulated and demonstrated for the world to see a glimpse of His Kingdom shine through. This can happen overtime, and does not necessarily need to happen all simultaneously, as each engagement with another culture refines one's perspective, and the refining process is a continual process until the return of Christ and the fullness of His Kingdom can be actualized. Until then, each additional cross-cultural engagement to listen and learn adds greater visibility into His Kingdom here on earth.

Hiebert's proposal, while helpful in bearing witness to an external reality that is not fully enmeshed in any culture, does not directly speak to the ways in which each

culture already contributes and portrays part of the larger Kingdom cultural reality, albeit not in its fullness by any means. Priest's proposal addresses the cultural interpretation of biblical norms through its own lens; however, it remains unclear how Priest would address the *impact* upon one culture by another, the interaction between majority world cultures, and the larger gap of Kingdom culture (or Biblical norms, as Priest refers to it), which exists and is a blindspot for both of two cultural interpretations when they come into interaction with each other. Perhaps this is where it can more clearly be seen the necessity to have multiple interactions, with multiple cultures, such that what might be a common blindspot between two cultures, can be exposed by a third and fourth culture in the ways in which the Kingdom of God manifests itself in those communal bodies of believers.

Paul Hiebert has another thought, which moves the conversation forward towards the transformation process of growing in Kingdom-likeness, again not quite as directly as perhaps could be said, but pointing in the direction that I believe the Church must choose to grow. "…the kingdom of God is always prophetic and calls all cultures toward God's ideals, and that citizens of that kingdom are to form living communities that manifest the nature of that kingdom."[236]

In the same way that no one culture has a crystal clear, unblemished, unbiased vision of the fullness of the Truth and reality of the Kingdom of God, neither do two cultures alone in their isolated partnership fully understand the Kingdom as a pair. A slight refining of vision happens in this interchange and overlapping of perspectives as Culture A and Culture B come together, and the initial stages of exfoliating their theology begins. A slight exposure and awareness to some cultural blindspots could lead to

[236] Hiebert, Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues, 103.

growth and pruning that yields more Kingdom likeness. However, the task is not done. What happens when two cultures perhaps have similar cultural biases and blindspots? What happens when Cultural A's discontinuity of culture projects a false claim of sinfulness onto Culture B, where in fact the distortion is in the vision rather than in the actions or worldview of the one being seen? These questions must be asked to more fully grow in Kingdom-likeness as the entity of the Body of Christ, which is the Global Church throughout the ages.

How do we proceed and seek after such a Kingdom vision? The Truth of an absolute Kingdom culture and reality exists, which is as stable, unwavering, pure, holy, faithful, authentic, loving, just, and Christ-like as God's self. It is unchanging throughout the ages, persistent, and untainted by the sin of the world. The earthly reflection of this Kingdom of God, is a blurred, stained, broken glass window smudged with grime, grit, and paint that is not easily be removed.

To 'see' the Kingdom of God through this window is to see a distorted vision of what is truly beyond the glass. What is beyond the glass is authentic and real, yet to hold onto the distorted glass as the supreme depiction of God's Kingdom is a slight against God Himself and a disservice to all who desire to truly know God and His beloved community. It takes intentional effort to address the stains of sin smeared upon the glass while simultaneously not aggressively hacking it off and in the process chipping out pieces of the glass that actually were supposed to be there. Doing the later in the process of intending to rid of the former still distorts the vision as it is missing part of the lens through which to see properly. In the same way, to hold onto only one culture's interpretation of scripture to see and understand the truth of the Kingdom of God is to

choose to prefer the gritted, smudged, distorted version of the window rather than a window that is in process of being exfoliated and refined through collaboration with fellow Global Church siblings, a window that through work of the Holy Spirit and through the diversity of the children of God removes syncretized grit to open the view for a clearer picture of the Kingdom of God. The process both changes the view others have as well as the visibility of the window itself.

Priest's diagram (Figure 5.2) is a start, but ideally would be relabeled generically for any culture rather than being a Western-centric model. Additionally, it would be best to reframe and reimagine the mental model used to articulate such a deep theologically expansive idea such as the Kingdom of God. It is in the overlapping with one another that the exfoliation through rubbing together brings forth renewed clearing of vision in both cultures. This process is ongoing, as time, space, and other cultures refine the vision from the build-up of cultural syncretism to a distilled and purer portrayal of the Kingdom of God, just as iron sharpens iron. It will never be complete until Christ's second coming but will give a glimpse of what is to come in the fullness of His reign and His Kingdom come, a manifestation of the prayer for "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."[237]

Other scholars have looked at the need for joint missions together as part of God's work in the world. Dr. Hae-Won Kim at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies says:

> *With the dawning of the era of World Christianity, we can no longer afford to ignore what God is doing in the global South. Scholars from both the global North and South must commit to sustained engagement and dialogue in order to help each other to gain a more complete picture*

[237] Matthew 6:10

> *of God's work around the world and to participate fully in the mission dei.*[238]

Learning from our brothers in Turkey, part of our shaping as the Global Church, is to grow in love and unity as One Body. This requires the coming together in Christ rather than the splintering into denominations in which we feel comfortable. Pastor Ara's sharing of the trajectory of development of theology in Turkey is equally helpful for us to consider as part of the Global Church as well:

> *Our theology is growing in great unity. We are one in Christ Jesus. Our aim is to build the kingdom of God in Turkey. Our aim of our theology is not to build the kingdom of America or a Greek or Baptists, but the kingdom of God in Turkey, we are all living in this time. Our Evangelical Alliance, our churches, we are all in the same, we believe in the same. If they are charismatic, we love them. If they are Baptists, we love them. We grow together. We do everything together. Our aim is to build the kingdom of God in the Islamic community.*[239]

It is a beautiful thing that prophetic women are rising up leading theological conversations in the USA, women like Kathy Khang, Sandra Maria Van Opstal, Rev. Brenda Salter McNeil, Natalia Kohn Rivera, Noemi Vega Quiñones, Kristy Garza Robinson, Truth's Table Sisters (Michelle Higgins, Christina Edmondson, and Ekemini Uwan), among others. As we hear from Global sisters like Sister Anne, Stephanie Lowery, Gilian, and Mama Cecilia, as we did in previous chapters, our minds are sharpened. We view and read with new eyes. How much richer would our worldviews be if we also heard from rising Christian theologians in all 234 countries and territories? If the image of God is revealed through His people, and each person is shaped by their culture, it is essential that we are learning through active engagement with all cultures

[238] Hae-Won Kim, "Intercultural Team Teaching as a Pedagogical Model for Intercultural Collaboration in Global Theological Education," CEJ, 3, 12, no. 1 (2015): 130–31.
[239] Pastor Ara, March 17, 2021 Zoom Interview with Pastor Ara.

composed of all ethnicities. This part of us, our individual ethnicities and the collective ethnicities of the body of Christ, will remain with us in our resurrected bodies for eternity worshipping the One True God, Yahweh, around His throne as depicted in Revelation 7.

Some of the lack of engagement has been an oppressive even if unintentional silencing. Kathy Khang explains that "women of color sit precariously and boldly in the intersection of race and gender, where raising our voices is a subversive, countercultural act that can earn us the labels of defiant or threatening: the angry Latina or black woman, the dragon lady, or even Pocahontas. There is mansplaining and whitesplaining, and women of color can't avoid either."[240] Yet, without the voices of women of color being heard in the academic and theological discussions, there is a richness that is lost. There have been many contributions by men in the West, and men in general in the majority world Global Church who have been part of the theological discourse in their own settings, for decades. These things should not be forgotten. However, the lack of contributions from women and people of color across cultural divides, has been a loss for the potential growth of the Church into the fullness of what God has called and created it to be. Lenses corrected in one direction, but neglected in necessary correction of another direction, and counterbalance to prevent overcorrecting, keeps vision blurry. This partial sharpening of our lenses through socially accepted majority voice trends to seek the truth of God, without the fullness of hearing from all cultures and people as God intended and has commanded everyone to be a witness, proclaimer, and disciple maker, undermines the building up of the Church to truly reflect Kingdom of God as a witness to the world.

[240] Kathy Khang, Raise Your Voice: Why We Stay Silent and How to Speak Up (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 3.

Over the centuries, the trust, inspiration and awe of unschooled, uneducated, and untrained ordinary Palestinian fishermen[241] has been exchanged for seeking out only the highest educated, published, and popularized authors, most of whom happen to be of white European-descent from the Protestant Church, and a few with Catholic backgrounds, predominately all men. This limited angle pushes out the other needed parts of the Body of Christ to fully see, recognize, and live as the Body of Christ was designed and intended for. The Holy Spirit speaks and lives with equal power and presence in all believers. Who are we to choose who is more anointed to proclaim the Kingdom? Let us not err like the prophet Samuel by looking at outward appearances for which God might call and anoint rather than at the heart where His Spirit dwells.[242] What would the Church look like if the testimonies of Christians like Layado Cecilia and Grace Akallo were heard across the Global Church today just as the testimonies of women in the Early Church brought hope and testimony of the Risen Lord to encourage those waiting upon God amidst hardship and despair?

If Christ had only meant for His Kingdom proclamation to be understood by the wise and learned, and to be taught from the world-renowned super power cultures to the lesser educated, marginalized, and oppressed cultures, then why did he come as a child of a carpenter to a no-name village in Palestine during the time of Roman occupation, and gather men, women, rich, poor, educated, and non-educated alike to be the first believers of the early Church? Just as Christ made himself known to the least of these through parables, teachings, and divine encounters, Christ continues to make himself known to people globally. He is the same true Christ, forever unchanging. He is being revealed

[241] Acts 4:13
[242] 1 Samuel 16:7

more and more to believers as they seek after Him in prayer, in worship, in Scripture, in daily life, and in fellowship.

The interpretations of the Scriptures and innate understandings of Christ manifest uniquely in each culture and need to be heard and grappled with in every other culture. Each of our cultures has blindspots. Each of our cultures has shards of the Kingdom mosaic God is crafting to display His glory and His True Kingdom through, which will only ever fully be realized in His eternal reign of Kingdom come.

What could the Global Church look like if it operated out of a desire to be refined as much as to refine? Perhaps there could be a greater witness of His Kingdom through the Holy Spirit's transformation of 'us', the Church, when we choose to draw near to Christ and to one another as the Body of Christ, greater than only giving verbal proclamation of the Kingdom of God to 'them'? What might it look like to allow the *imago Dei* in the Church form and shape the movement of the Global Church, bringing forth peace, shalom, love, hope, truth, justice, joy, and the fullness of the Kingdom of God as displayed through the diversity of the people of God as humble servants who seek to listen, learn, repent, and love above anything else? Would the world know we are Christians by our love, as Christ informed his disciples?

Mutual cross-cultural partnerships to grow in Kingdom-likeness is a gift both to the Church and to the world. For the Church, it allows us to see more of the Kingdom for ourselves and to grow in deeper love, awe, and admiration of the God whom we worship and love. For many in the world, a clearer vision, witness, and testimony of God's kingdom will inspire what they long for – equity of humanity, unity across racial lines, and justice lived out. The version they try to pursue is faulty without Christ's powerful

transformation, for it is only possible with Christ at the center of it all. They can see that the things hoped for, is something in themselves that longs for a better world that is possible because that is how God created it to be. Our ability to grow in authenticity and live more authentically as a learning, breathing, living system of the Global Church that is more and more a reflection of His Kingdom come is part of our work in the world; it is part of the Church's mission. Mission is not just to go out, but to be sanctified as the Body, so that we are an entity of individuals who both individually and collectively pursue His Kingdom and allow His Kingdom to transform our entire beings and systems, the way we look and live; as our hearts and minds change, so should our actions. Until our actions reflect Christ, our hearts and minds must always be in a posture of surrender and repentance to be humble to change towards Christ rather than remain stagnant and stuck in the ways that keep us looking more like ourselves than like him.

There are multiple levels to move collectively towards a more authentic vision of the Kingdom of God, or at least a more authentic reflection on this side of heaven. First, there must be an intentional growth and recognized necessity for listening, learning, and receiving global theological education. Diane Stintson advocates for this, saying, "Given the unprecedented development in world Christianity over the past century, global theological education is no longer an option but a necessity if we are to truly live out our calling as the body of Christ in the world today."[243] Global theological education is not just a nice thing to have and learn from, but a necessity. Without the cross-cultural theological conversations to educate the Church, the local understanding of the Body of Christ becomes locally robust and simultaneously atrophied without the astute

[243] Yeh, Majority World Theologies, 72.

recognition of what is truly the giftedness of each contributing part of the Body of Christ globally.

Second, there is a need for lament, repentance, and recognition that this cross-cultural theological listening to learn has not happened enough previously, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. Regardless, there has historically been a majority voice scripting the theological conversation and dictating the interpretations of Scripture from a narrow perspective. The stripping of others' voices, failing to recognize the *imago Dei* in all humans, and discrediting the movement of the Holy Spirit apart from direct missions' records, has brought damage and suffering to many believers of non-white majority cultures. Time and time again, many converts to Christianity have testified of how the Holy Spirit moves to penetrate, prepare hearts, witness, and reveal Godself through creation and dreams to people across nations, prior to any arrival of foreigners. Like in any other area of Christ's Lordship, we must confess before we can repent and walk in a new way- His way as it is the way, the truth, and the life.[244]

Some might argue that a multi-ethnic church or spiritual understanding of the unity of all believers globally is sufficient in understanding the truth of the Kingdom of God. I would argue, however, that this is not the full truth. While a visibly multi-ethnic gathering is a step towards the bringing together of peoples of all languages, tribes, tongues, and nations to possibly grow and learn together, if there is a majority cultural ruling of traditions, practices, liturgical flow of worship, leadership style, presence, and influence in communities, then it is not truly a reflection of the Kingdom of God knit together. The Kingdom of God is an upside-down Kingdom where our Lord, the Son of God embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, came in the form of a Middle Eastern Jewish

[244] John 14:6

baby boy. This baby boy was born to unwed parents, temporarily squatting on land they did not own, under Roman oppression, during which time genocide against babies such as him caused his family to flee and become refugees of war. Our Lord grew up as a refugee in a foreign land prior to returning to one of the least desirable towns of his own people's nation. He grew up as the son of a *tekton* (translated as craftsman, stonecutter, or carpenter), a low paying and physically laborious profession during his era of living. He was orphaned by Joseph,[245] his earthly father, sometime during his adolescent and young adult years to be raised by a single mom who had many other mouths to feed, his earthly mother a widow and earthly siblings also single orphans.[246] And yet, this was the one our Lord God Almighty chose, through whom He desired to bring forth the fullness of truth of the Kingdom of God to the World.

If God thought it providential in His sovereign will to proclaim the truth of His Kingdom through a refugee, a boy raised under persecution in the 1st century, then perhaps there are voices coming out of war-torn places and under-resourced desperate to make ends meet communities in our world today as well. These people have equally been made in the image of God with a voice to point us deeper into the truth and realities of God's Kingdom today. Consider the wrestling of Peter and Paul: two men, one married and one single, one a fisherman and one a scholar, one a Jewish minority and one a privileged Roman citizen. Yet, both deny Christ at various points of their journeys and both are gifted with prophetic leadership that has shaped the generations that followed.

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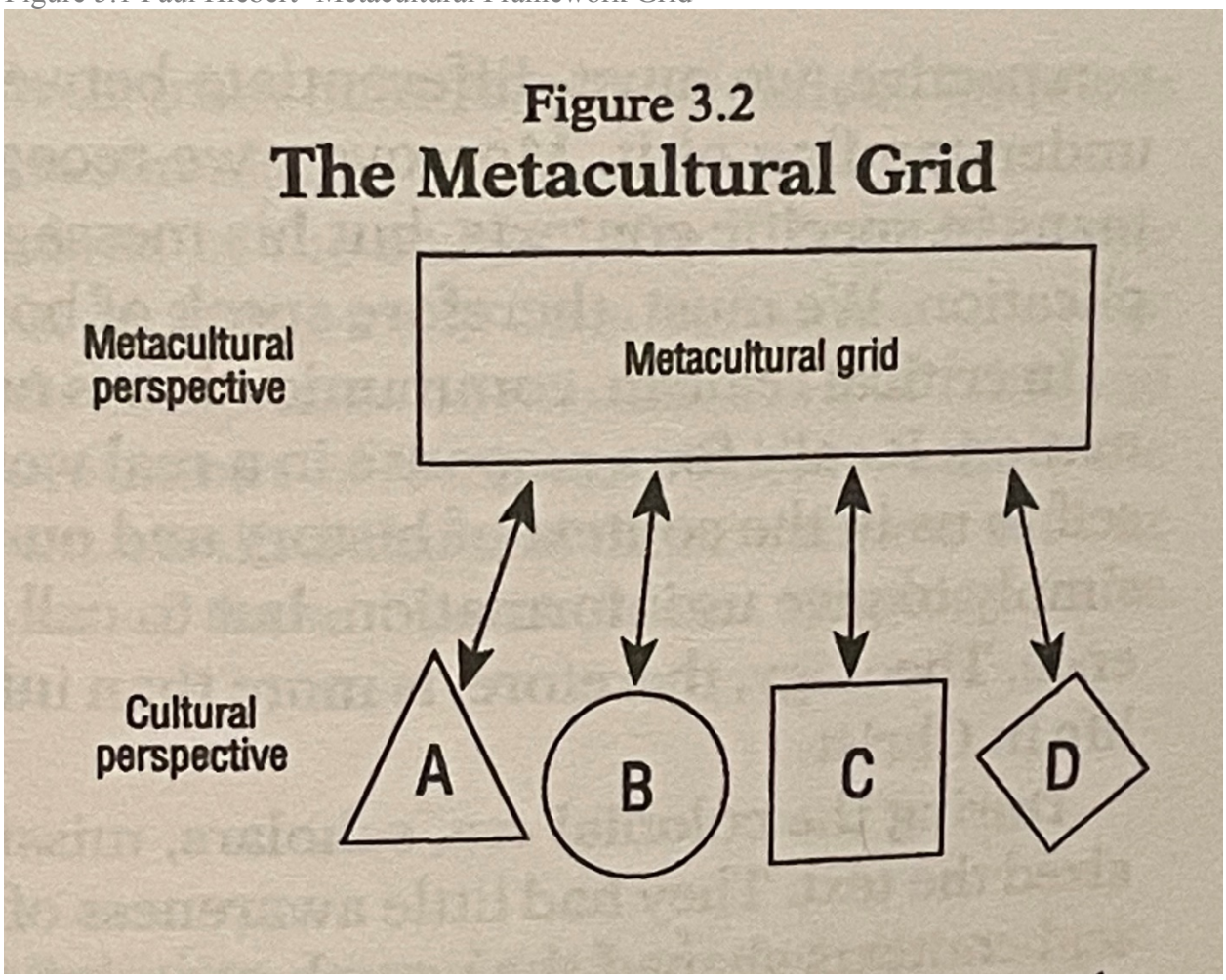
[245] Orphaned is used here in the Ugandan understanding of the concept and word. When a father is lost as the traditional financial and household provider, children are declared as orphans as often times their widowed mothers are not financially able to provide for the needs of the children. The term single orphan and double orphan is commonly used to differentiate whether only the father or both parents have deceased. James P.M. Ntozi, "Effect of AIDS on Children: The Problem of Orphans in Uganda," Health Transition Review, Vulnerability to HIV Infection and Effects of Aids in Africa and Asia/India, 7 (1997): 23–24.
[246] See footnote above.

Consider also Esther, who lived under oppressive rule and was bestowed with gifts of beauty by Creator God, opening up a pathway for her calling as a leader; she was able to advocate for her people's freedom in the face of patriarchal power that was abusive and violent towards her ethnic and religious group. Who are the Esthers and fishermen of today? Can we listen for them and allow their voices as siblings in Christ to expand our understanding of the Kingdom and refine the views through which we perceive, acknowledging that no one is a perfect representation of God apart from Jesus himself?

It is time, as Sister Anne has already stated, for the church to recognize "that all cultures are relative and equally important. It is only in this realization that the church will move from a Euro-American centered church to a world-centered church."[247] It begins with realization, followed by an act of engagement, to step forward into cross-cultural partnerships with brothers and sisters for the sake of transformation to reflect the Kingdom of God more authentically than before. May we as the Church, step outside of our cultural contextual lens to lend an ear to the voices of the Turkish and Ugandan believers, who have rich seeds of faith that bear witness to Christ himself and the fullness of the Kingdom of God through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit uniquely portrayed through them. In drawing near, may we allow *imago Dei* in our siblings to expose our own cultural syncretistic worldviews that limit our own understanding of the Kingdom. May we humbly seek to listen and be transformed. May we draw one another near to love, share our unique giftedness, and hope empowered by the Spirit to refine our vision. May this intentional listening to *aile* around the *ekyoto* move us to listen across nations of believers, and move us in repentance back to Christ, such that together we reflect a more purified embodiment of the Kingdom of God to the world.

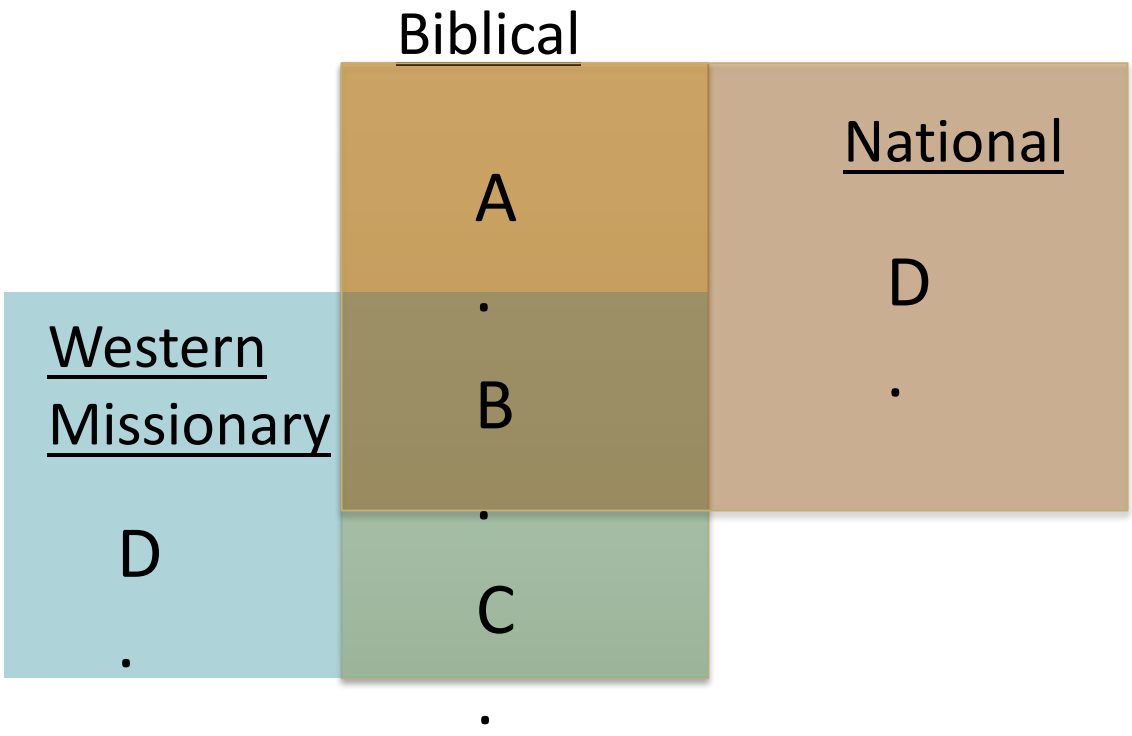
[247] Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Is Mutuality Possible? An African Response," 46.

Figure 5.1 Paul Hiebert- Metacultural Framework Grid[248]



[248] Hiebert, Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues, 69.

Figure 5.2 Robert Priest- Cultural Blind Spots.
Areas A & B are congruent with Biblical norms for National. Areas B & C are congruent with Biblical norms for Western Missionary. Area A is a blind spot for Western Missionary. Area C is a blind spot for National. Areas D is where there is discontinuity for both the national and the missionary due to their cultural backgrounds.[249]



[249] Paul Martindale, "WM722 #6b Cultural Blindspots" (Lecture + Powerpoint, Applied Anthropology for Missions, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, May 2, 2018).

Appendix A:
Transcript of 'The Young Turks and the Armenians: From Revolution to Genocide'[250]

(Scholar Taner Akçam describes the Young Turks' rise to power in the Ottoman Empire and their policies that led to the Armenian Genocide.)

By the 1890s, the once massive and dominant Ottoman Empire was racked by internal unrest. Many groups, including Armenians and Turks, called for change. One group to emerge was a faction within the reformist Committee of Union and Progress Party, or CUP. This faction was known as the Young Turks.

On July 24, 1908, the Young Turks and the CUP successfully overthrew the Sultan and took control of the Ottoman government. Many Armenians supported this shift, because the Young Turks promised equality for all groups within the empire, including Armenians.

Reforms meant, very simple, participation of Armenians in the administration, in the police, in the security forces, and allowing Armenians free in the education. And then, total equality. For example, acceptance Armenian testimonies in Islam, Muslim courts also, and so on and so forth.

And Armenians, through their revolutionary organization, Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF, they were part of Ottoman government also. So they were in a strategic alliance with Union and Progress Party.

Both party, for example, beginning of 1909, established a joint committee and the task of this committee was to implement reforms. And this committee went to Eastern Anatolia, prepared the report on what the reforms should be and so on and so forth. But these reforms never realized.

The Young Turks came to power with a promise of equality for all. However, tensions continued within the empire, as former supporters of the Sultan rebelled in a violent backlash against Armenian equality. Problems continued with a series of conflicts in the Balkans that resulted in the Ottoman Empire losing its non-Turkish, non-Muslim populations in the region, as well as much of its territory. These conflicts came to a head in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913.

Balkan War 1913 was a really important turning point. Ottomans lost, within one week, approximately 80% of their European population and maybe more than 60% of their European landholding. It was a big shock for them to lose these territories within one week.

[250] The Young Turks and the Armenians: From Revolution to Genocide.

And another important information to understand the shock that it created, they actually—the ruling elite of Union and Progress Party—they actually lost their birthplaces. They were all coming from Balkan.

And this was really very difficult to digest. And I think—I say, I think, because we don't know any evidence that they decided, you know what? This is it. We cannot live with these Christians in this country together.

In 1913, Young Turks Mehmed Talaat, Ahmed Djemal, and Ismail Enver organized a military coup and formed a coalition of ultranationalists who believed that the only way to hold on to the empire was to embrace a radical ideology of ethnic resettlement, deportation, and eventually, genocide.

It was the end of the policy of unity of the subject people within the empire. So then, they openly declared their Turk-ism. Turkish nationalism became official party policy. And then, they started to develop certain plans for Anatolia.

They started implementing a policy, which I call homogenization of Anatolia. The purpose was to get rid of the Christians out of Anatolia.

During that time, there were approximately two and a half million or three million Greeks and around 1.8 million Armenians. And according to these plans, first, they targeted Greek population on the Aegean coast.

The outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 provided the Young Turks with the perfect cover to carry out their murderous plans.

Ottoman government established a secret organization within Defense Ministry. And this special organization attacked the Greek villages on the coastal area. But the main purpose was not extermination. To create fear and to empty the Greek religious and to push the Greek people on the shores, so that they should leave Anatolia. And Ottoman government's official policy was, we don't have anything to do with it.

And it stopped 1st November 1914, emptying of the Greek villages. The reason was Germany. German government asked Turkey to stop this forcible expulsion policy. Because they were hoping to get Greece on their side during the First World War. And Ottomans obeyed the German demand. And 1st November 1914, deportation of Greeks stopped.

Then, Armenians started, also, asking reforms, encouraged by Balkan countries. Ottomans never wanted to implement this reform. This is the reason why they entered the World War I. This was the reason why they canceled, immediately, this reform agreement when they entered the war, November 1914.

During the war, the Ottomans' greatest fear was losing the mostly Armenian region of Eastern Anatolia to the Russians, who would, they feared, invariably support Armenian reforms.

When Russia invades this area, they would implement the reform plan. We will lose these territories. Instead of losing this territory, let's get rid of the Armenians and we can secure this land. This is what happened.

They emptied the entire territory of Armenians. They destroyed the Armenian communities, exterminated them. And this is one of the central reasons why Turkey denies today the Armenian Genocide, because we basically built our nation-state on that genocide.

Genocide was not only as a response to the war, or was not only a plan to destroy the Armenian communities.

Their main goal was to create a country that consists of Muslim Turkic majority. And how you get Muslim Turkic majority? You can develop these on two ways. Number one, you get rid of the Christians, by massacres or expelling. The second way of homogenization is assimilation. You can assimilate them. But you can assimilate people and groups only if they come a certain level.

The ruling elite of Union and Progress Party developed a plan, saying that Christians and non-Turkish elements should not exceed, in certain areas, 10% of the population. This is their governability threshold.

So throughout this period, the genocidal period, they implement both policy—physical examination and assimilation, hand in hand. And their purpose was to reduce the Armenian numbers as much as possible so that they should never raise their demands again.

The Muslim population of the area, the resettlement area, with a very generous estimate, were around 1.8 to 2 million. And the total number of Armenians that had to be deported were around 1.3 million. And you have to make 1.3 million 10% of 2 million. So, this means, you have to really find a way that reduce Armenian number from 1.3 million all the way down to 1.8 or 200,000. And this is really, at the end, the number of surviving Armenians.

Appendix B:
Letter to the Abgar- from the National Catholic Register[251]

Abgar V, king of Edessa, was suffering a grievous illness for which there was no cure. Word of the miracles of Jesus reached his ear, and he wrote the following letter to Him by Ananias the Tabularius (something like an official envoy):

"Abgar Ukkama (the Black), to Jesus the good Savior who has appeared in the region of Jerusalem, greeting. The reports about you and your cures have reached me, how they are effected by you without drugs and herbs. For, as the story goes, you make the blind to see, the lame to walk, and you cleanse lepers, and you cast out unclean spirits and demons, and you cure those who are tortured in lingering disease, and you raise the dead. When I heard all this about you, I decided that either one of two things is true, either that you are God, and having come down from heaven are doing these things, or you are a Son of God, who does these things. On this account, then, I have written to beg you to hasten to me and to cure me of the suffering which I have. For I have heard also that the Jews murmur against you and wish to harm you. But I have a very small and venerable city which is enough for us both."

Jesus, impressed by the faith displayed in this letter, replied, either by his own hand or through words dictated to Ananais (stories vary).

"Blessed are you who have believed although you have not seen me. For it is written concerning me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, and that those who have not seen me will themselves believe and shall be saved. But regarding what you wrote me, to come to you, I must fulfill all things for which I was sent, and, after thus fulfilling them, be taken up to Him who sent me. And when I have been taken up, I shall send you one of my disciples to heal your suffering and to give life to you and those with you."

[251] Thomas L. McDonald, "Is the Legend True? Did Jesus Write a Letter to King Abgar?" National Catholic Register, National Catholic Register (blog), January 19, 2016, https://www.ncregister.com/blog/is-the-legend-true-did-jesus-write-a-letter-to-king-abgar.

Appendix C:
Christianity in Western Asia
Center for the Study of Global Christianity 2013 Report

Western Asia

Christianity

Christianity declined from 7.3% of Western Asia's total population in 1970 to 6.1% in 2010, with a further decline to 5.4% projected by 2020. This net change has been due largely to the emigration of Christians as a result of religious violence in the region. Lebanon, Turkey and, more recently, Iraq and Syria have been at the center of some of these tensions, with the former two having fewer Christians now than in 1970 despite overall population growth. However, nine of the region's 18 countries saw an increase in Christian percentage between 1970 and 2010, and it is anticipated that eight will see an increase between 2010 and 2020 (with another two holding steady).

Much of this growth has come as a result of immigration, partially by those displaced from other countries in the region, but primarily through the influx of migrant workers to the service industries of the region's wealthy nations. Many of these workers are Christians, coming from countries such as the Philippines and working in Western Asia for two or three years at a time. Another source of growth was a result of the end of Communism in the former Soviet Union. Armenia and Georgia, both of which historically were majority Christian nations, saw large increases in the numbers of people identifying as Christian between 1970 and 2000.

Some of the world's oldest Christian communities are preserved in Western Asia, though in many countries the repeated displacement of Christians over time has left only small pockets of these ancient Orthodox Christians. Nevertheless, Orthodox Christianity is still the largest major tradition in the region, with almost nine million adherents; two thirds of Orthodox Christians in Western Asia reside in Armenia or Georgia. Roman Catholics retain a strong presence in Lebanon despite emigration, while in Saudi Arabia and the

Christianity in Western Asia, 1970 to 2020

	1970			2020			
Country	**Population**	**Christians**	**%**	**Population**	**Christians**	**%**	**Rate***
Western Asia	86,925,000	6,356,000	7.3	277,388,000	14,847,000	5.4	1.71
Armenia	2,518,000	858,000	34.1	3,146,000	2,981,000	94.8	2.52
Azerbaijan	5,172,000	263,000	5.1	10,231,000	349,000	3.4	0.57
Bahrain	212,000	8,200	3.9	1,508,000	119,000	7.9	5.49
Cyprus	614,000	469,000	76.5	1,218,000	876,000	71.9	1.26
Georgia	4,707,000	1,650,000	35.0	4,080,000	3,502,000	85.8	1.52
Iraq	10,022,000	369,000	3.7	42,684,000	492,000	1.2	0.58
Israel	2,850,000	79,000	2.8	8,666,000	184,000	2.1	1.70
Jordan	1,667,000	83,400	5.0	7,366,000	166,000	2.3	1.38
Kuwait	753,000	38,600	5.1	3,394,000	310,000	9.2	4.26
Lebanon	2,464,000	1,536,000	62.3	4,516,000	1,511,000	33.5	-0.03
Oman	732,000	3,800	0.5	3,290,000	151,000	4.6	7.62
Palestine	1,125,000	53,200	4.7	5,317,000	65,000	1.2	0.40
Qatar	108,000	4,800	4.5	2,199,000	209,000	9.5	7.81
Saudi Arabia	5,772,000	18,300	0.3	33,535,000	1,542,000	4.6	9.27
Syria	6,368,000	617,000	9.7	24,079,000	977,000	4.1	0.92
Turkey	35,464,000	290,000	0.8	80,753,000	178,000	0.2	-0.97
United Arab Emirates	232,000	13,600	5.9	9,174,000	1,182,000	12.9	9.34
Yemen	6,145,000	1,700	0.0	32,232,000	52,300	0.2	7.09

*Rate = average annual Christian growth rate, percent per year 1970–2020

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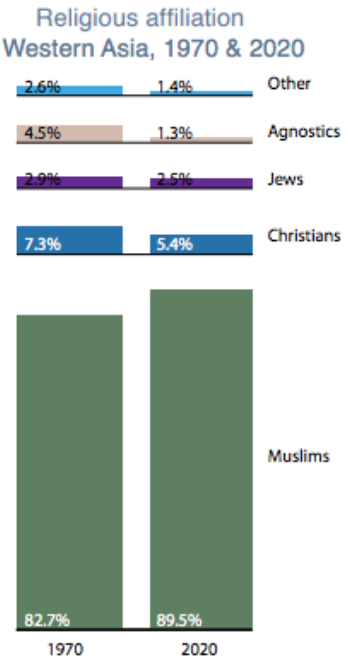
United Arab Emirates their numbers have increased substantially since 1970 due to the influx of Roman Catholic migrant workers. Largely as a result of this phenomenon, the percentage of the region's church members who are Roman Catholic increased from 27% in 1970 to 38% in 2010.

Religion

All three Abrahamic faiths trace their origins to Western Asia, and demographically they continue to dominate the region. Islam, with by far the most adherents, has grown at a rapid rate despite its large size, increasing from 82.7% of the population in 1970 to an estimated 89.5% by 2020. This is because the Muslim populations in 12 of the region's 18 countries have grown more rapidly than the region's population as a whole, accounting for two thirds of the increase.Turkey has the largest Muslim and total populations in the region and accounts for another quarter of the increase, despite lagging Muslim population growth rates there.

Today Western Asia is home to the world's largest Jewish population (in Israel). In 1970 almost 97% of the region's Jews lived in Israel. Today that figure is about 91%, with another 8% living in Palestine due to the construction of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. The presence of these settlements, an ongoing source of both religious and social tension in the heavily Muslim region, is just one element of a larger conflict over the right of the State of Israel to exist. Fifteen percent of Jews in Western Asia personally knew a Christian in 2010.



Center for the Study of Global Christianity,
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Glossary of Quick Definitions:

Individualist- one who adheres to the idea of pursuing individual preferences or desires prior to consideration of the impact upon the cohesiveness of the group; one who seeks autonomy and independence from the group.

Collectivist- one who adheres to the idea of pursuing cohesiveness and the togetherness of individuals in a group over the prioritization of an individual want or desire.

Universalist- one who adheres to the idea that what is relevant or true is universal, regardless of situation or circumstance.

Particularlist- one who adheres to the idea that what is relevant or true is particular to specific situations or circumstances. There is nuance and adjustment for every situation and circumstance.

Specific culture- a culture where relationships are specifically divided based upon shared public space or experiences. There is no obligation to share across specific spheres. Relationships that enter the private sphere are few and usually overlap across multiple specific spheres.

Diffuse culture- a culture where relationships that have moved beyond the public to the private sphere are diffuse in depth, breadth, and areas of life that are included as appropriate and expected to be a part of the private relationship.

Private culture- a culture where privacy and separation from others is valued and respected, whether physical, verbal, mental, or emotional. Matters and possessions can remain in the private sphere without indicating any social abnormality, ostracism, or dysfunction.

Inclusive culture- a culture that desires to always include and welcome all individuals in every activity, event, or situation. Aloneness often indicative of exclusion and abandonment rather than preference in this culture.

Syncretism- the action or process of combining, merging, uniting, or enmeshing different cultures, religions, or philosophies with one another.

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